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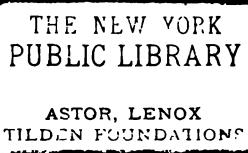
CHARLES EDWARD HEWITT



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"AND THEN THE CERTAIN ONE DEPARTED"

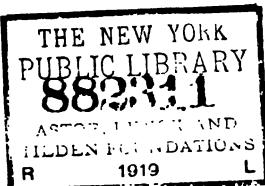
The House of Judah

By
CHARLES EDWARD HEWITT



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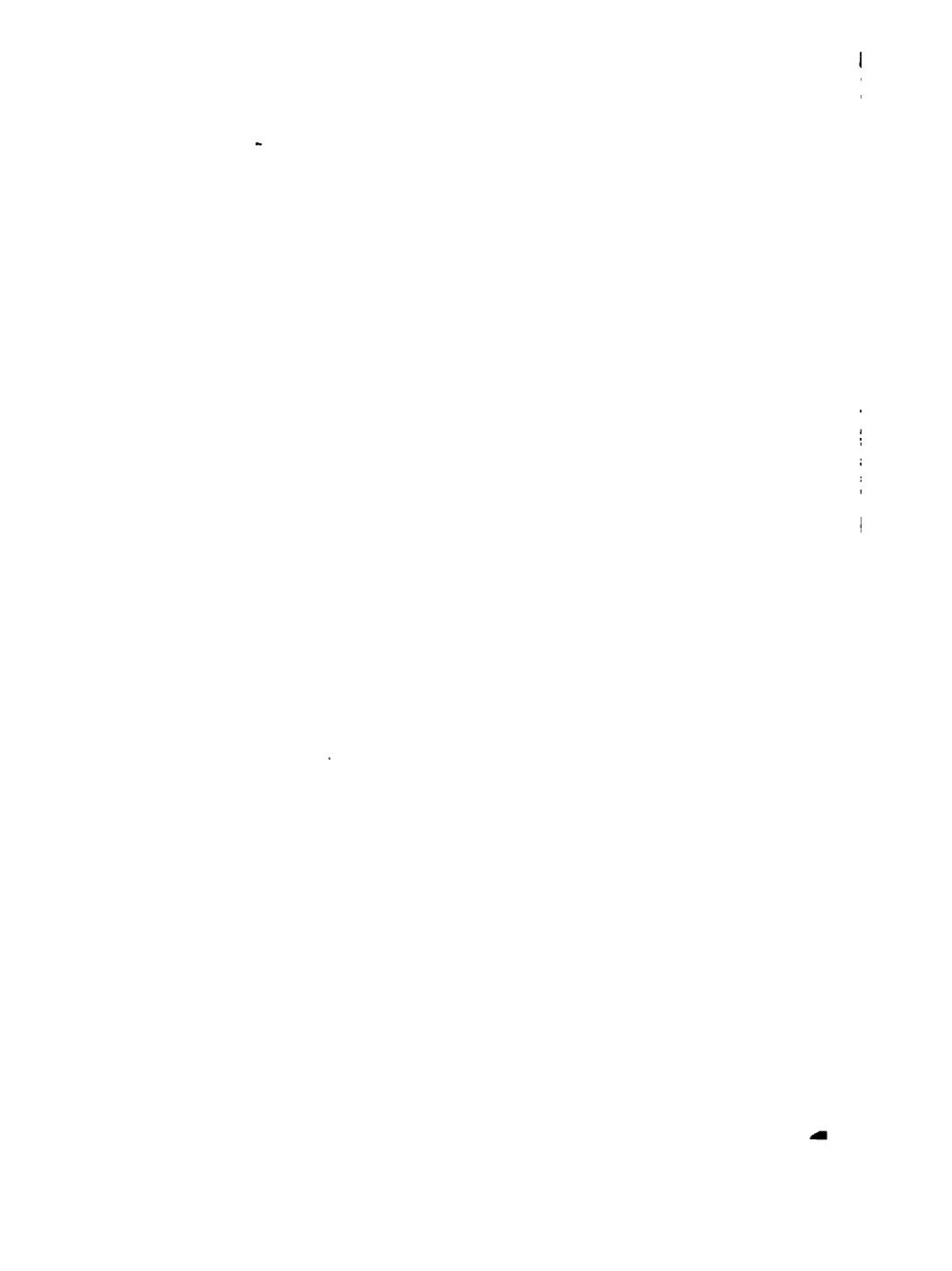
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“Hold a moment, Rachel,” the recumbent one suddenly exclaimed, springing to upright posture. “There is a matter to tell thee which was nearly forgotten. An appointment I have in Jerusalem with our father and Saul of Tarsus, and when thou returnest from the feast 'tis likely the journey thence will be well begun.”

“May the God of our fathers give thee joy and speed in the way, brother,” and with motion infinitely expressive of sisterly affection a cheek of the texture and coloring of a rose leaf was offered for salute of parting.

The man gently touched it with his lips, for an instant searching deeply the depths of the beautiful eyes trustingly turned to him. Without falter, without quiver the scrutiny was met.

“To those that are childlike and innocent as thou, sister, I grant the son of Joseph may seem as a prophet wonderful with power and virtue,” he said. “But mighty arms of evil and oppression have compassed Judah, and a man child must be given who shall wax great to conquer; even with the strength of the Lord of Hosts; but thou art but a babe in the understanding of such things. May Jehovah keep all harm from thee till we meet again.” Thus saying, he strode from the chamber.

CHAPTER II

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."—*2 Corinthians 13. 5.*

TIBERIAS, the capital of the province of Galilee, was built upon the western shore of the Lake (or Sea) of Gennesaret through the decree of Herod Antipas, and although the latter had hoped to populate the town with Jews, but few of the sons of Abraham would take permanent residence therein, as the foundations had been laid in an ancient graveyard, and therefore the vicinity was unholy to them. A range of hills traced the horizon westward, a spur of which reached out a rugged arm almost menacingly toward this new creation, forming back of it a breastwork of basalt cliffs, as though to effectually hinder further progress in that direction.

Almost in the very shadow of the frowning of this green-black bulwark a small residence had been built by Rabbi Elim, of Jerusalem, for his motherless son and daughter, at the latter's special request; and as the place was fashioned simply to please what was considered a whim,

all thought had been turned to the fostering of comfort and pleasure for the inmates.

On the sixth day of the week, toward eventide, Rachel reclined in a luxuriously appointed pavilion on the roof of this dwelling, with an evident intention of supping in the cool of the open, for a white damask cloth was spread upon a small table, and platters of savory mutton and delicate wheatcakes to be eaten with crystal-clear honey, were ranged thereon in fashion calculated to tempt the most fastidious appetite.

“Thou hast again set cover for the young master, my good Philemon,” she observed, with appreciative glance toward her hand maid, continuing in tone tinctured with disappointment, “But most truly it seemeth as though he had determined to remain in Jerusalem until the Passover.”

The thin, brown face of the bondwoman now softened wonderfully with a brooding look such as a mother might give. “The young master ever hath held close to his heart the welfare of the cherished sister, and since the old days in the City of David hath not allowed such time to pass in absence from her. Is he like to do so now?” she half crooned, as though to a child.

“Thy speech soundeth good unto my ears, and doth strengthen and shame me both,” responded

the other. "Since the God of my fathers called mother unto himself the daughter of Rabbi Elim hath been weak of heart, and sorrowful indeed, giving but poor companionship to recompense the goodness of Rehoboam and thee."

Hot tears of sympathy filled the old serving woman's eyes, and she crouched low before her mistress.

"If thou hadst remained in the house of thy father, thy spirit might have been better aided from its gloom, O Sarai ['My lady'],” she whispered. “There were many in Jerusalem to give thee comfort, the honored Rabbi Elim himself among them; or thou couldst have dwelt in Cana, in the house of thy uncle, Rabbi Mahalaleel.”

“I could not abide where all things continually breathe of mother, Philemon; and as thou knowest, my father hath little time for aught save serving in the temple. And there is a special reason for my not desiring to be with the household of my uncle in Cana; but dry thy tears, faithful one! Thou ever sheddest a beam of comfort to dispel the dark moments of my soul, and I love thee.”

The speaker now drew the turbaned head close, even to her cheek. “Listen, Philemon!” she whispered. “There is a confidence which shall be given to thine ear as child to mother.”

At these words the other bowed a little lower, and two glistening drops fell to the roof's paving.

"Hush thee, woman! cease thy weeping!" begged the maiden. "The matter which is to be imparted should bring joy to us and not sorrowing; there is One here in the land of strangers who hath a marvelous power to impart strength and comfort to the need of my spirit, even Jesus of Nazareth, of whom great things have been spoken of late. When near him at the wedding feast at Cana virtue did seem to be imparted unto my soul simply by a touch of his garments; and one glance he gave unto me, eye to eye, told surely that in him I had a true friend and brother."

At this point the one confiding paused an instant to consider; at last she continued, slowly: "A most remarkable work did the Nazarene accomplish at the wedding feast, Philemon, the like of which hath not been done, no, not in Israel; but I would hold the telling of this thing for the coming of Rehoboam, and thou shalt be with us then to hear it."

The listener remained silent a moment, then she spoke lowly: "Have not the prophets foretold that such an one should come to rule over Israel?"

"Yea, the Messiah," was the answer. "But how many of the sons of Abraham dost thou think will

acknowledge the carpenter of Nazareth to be God's Anointed?"

"John of the desert hath already done so, and, it be rumored, some others, Sarai."

The young Jewess rested her softly rounded chin in one pink palm and toyed an instant with a platter, deeply thinking. At last she spoke again. "Humble folk, all of them, looked down upon by the priests and keepers of the law. But we are only women, Philemon, and can have no real part in such matters. Do thou bring the laver now that mine hands may be cleansed for the meal; for it seemeth useless to wait longer for the absent one."

What amber-hued honey! Surely the workers that gathered such nectar did wing labor's way across the slopes of the Holy Mountain itself.

"Hold a moment, Philemon! Dost thou not catch sound of footsteps ascending to the roof? Praise be to the God of our fathers—it is Rehoboam!"

The last ejaculation was also a greeting, for in a trice the maid was in the arms of her brother.

"What princely welcome is this?" the young man smiled playfully, nodding kindly the while to the bondwoman. "A feast fit for one of the House of Judah, presided over by as comely a damsel

as ever made glad a son of Abraham. Tut! tut! Rachel! Blush not so deeply; thou wilt receive finer compliments from many a man, I warrant me."

When the two had settled for the repast the late comer's glances focused sharply upon his companion's face. "Tell of the festivities at Cana, O my sister," he said, holding a full ripe pomegranate suspended motionless half way to his lips, so eagerly was the answer awaited.

"Thou hast received tidings of the marriage feast ere this, for thy manner proclaims it, brother; nevertheless I am fair willing to retail the events unto thee, for the wonder of certain of them cannot lessen even through many times the telling."

The speaker now held the other's gaze, eye to eye. "It is of the miracle thou art most anxious to hear," she smiled, going directly to the heart of the matter.

"Even of the miracle—so called," he responded, lowering his glances.

"Verily, a miracle in truth," was spoken simply. "The feast had but half progressed when it was made known to some that wine was lacking, a condition reflecting ill upon the governor, who is a free-handed and well-meaning man; and Mary

of Nazareth, being quick to understand the situation, went to her son for counsel."

The softly curved features of the one narrating now worked with intensity of feeling.

"Rehoboam, that marvelous One thus sought for advice bid the servants fill with water six water pots that were standing by, and when this was accomplished, to draw from them. The thing was done, and so surely as thou knowest my tongue is single, when the governor tasted thereof the liquid was pronounced wine—even the best! Deemest thou not such work a miracle?"

At this point depth of emotion caused the speaker's bosom to perceptibly quicken its heaving beneath the draperies of fine silk; and the eyes of the serving woman near grew wide and bright. But the one interrogated turned away his face, muttering the while: "'Twas hallucination or jugglery! Power hath not been given unto men to perform such work save Elijah and Moses. And is one like unto them among us?"

"In mine own eyes Jesus of Nazareth hath not peer among any that have dwelt upon the earth, brother; and concerning the forepart of thy speech, it soundeth unto me as blasphemy to mention such things in connection with him."

The voice usually so low and sweet now had

come with such volume and decision of accent that the man started from amazement.

“Is this my gentle Rachel?” he playfully chided; but thereupon seeing a blush of confusion tinge the other’s cheeks, his tones instantly became serious. “What thinkest our uncle at Cana of the Nazarene, O, my sister?”

“That he is Messiah in very truth; a conviction which also is held by our cousin Raphael; the remainder of the household look upon him as thou seemest to do, Rehoboam.”

The last portion of the response caused the son of Rabbi Elim to fidget a bit; it was plain he was adverse to being like, even in opinion, to certain members of his uncle’s household. At last he pushed the platters of food from him and arose, casting off an outer vestment of linen, for the evening was warm.

“Sister!” he presently spoke, having stepped out of the small pavilion to lean against the roof’s eastern coping in meditation a brief season, “thou shalt hear the import of a conference between thy father, Saul of Tarsus, and mine own self, which took place in Jerusalem, even whilst thou wast at the feast at Cana.”

When the one thus addressed had also come out of the summer house, and settled in posture

of listening, the man continued: "For reasons best known to the priests, and members of the Sanhedrin, an event which did occur some thirty years ago was greatly silenced and kept from the knowledge of the people. Our father did reveal the matter to Saul and thy brother that the claims of Jesus of Nazareth might be passed upon with judgment made more clear through knowledge."

The speaker now restlessly smoothed his thick flowing black beard, so deep was his interest in the subject in hand.

"It hath been kept on record by certain of the scribes that toward the end of the ninth month, some thirty years ago, three great princes of the East came to Jerusalem claiming to have been led thitherward by a star, to worship One born King of the Jews; and Herod the Great, being very jealous of his throne and well knowing that all Israel waited for Messiah, inquired diligently of the priests and doctors of the law where Christ should be born. As thou wilt recall, O Rachel, the prophet Micah hath written: 'And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel,' therefore the three strangers were sent

to David's town by Herod, who bade them make it known to him when the young child was found that he might come to worship also."

At this point the narrator's posture against the parapet of the roof tensely stiffened. "The starled princes found a Babe whom they worshiped, sister—cradled in a manger in a cave belonging to the khan at Bethlehem; and if this were all the story, we might look for the heaven-anointed King of the Jews to appear among us even now; but there is more. It is known that the three princely worshipers of the Child departed to their own land secretly, without notifying Herod, as commanded to do; and well do the daughters of Rama, of a generation back, recall the literal fulfillment of that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, 'In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning,' for on a day which standeth a reproach to the despot king forever, all children of Bethlehem and the coasts thereof, of two years or under, were slain in cold blood; for Herod, the fiend, intended to make sure the Jews should have no other king whilst he himself yet lived. But comprehendest thou the import of the matter, Rachel? If, indeed, the wise princes of the East worshiped Messiah in the cave of the khan at Bethlehem, and every

child of two years or under in those parts was surely slain directly after, then verily doth the chosen people look for their Redeemer in vain; for if these things are so, he hath already come upon the earth and hath been destroyed."

The one thus interrogated pressed both palms against her throbbing temples, speaking not for a long moment; her voice came then very lowly, as though from the innermost recesses of her soul:

"Thy sister comprehendeth that her father and brother and Saul of Tarsus do deem it quite impossible that Mary's son could have sprung from Bethlehem and be Messiah; for many in these parts know by the record in the temple that his age is thirty years; besides which, he is called a Nazarene, but this I know also—he is a man kingly with virtue, one whose compassion for all in sorrow or affliction seemeth godlike; and a greater than he—in spirit and in truth—will never arise in Israel."

When the gentle voice, filled with conviction, had subsided, the son of the House of Judah began to pace back and forth parallel to the parapet, his expressive features showing great perturbation. Now and again he paused hesitatingly as though about to speak, only to resume his pacing again. At last he halted directly in front of Rachel,

almost touching her—for the twilight was fast gathering—and he wished to watch her face closely.

“There lieth on my tongue a matter hard for thee to hear, sister, but thou must hear it; shall the thing be spoken now?” and a hand gentle as a woman’s touched the whiteness of her forehead.

A shiver passed over the small figure draped in the silken robes, as the premonition of an evil to come had showed its spectral shape.

“Surely, brother, the priests and scribes do not intend harm against the Nazarene,” she whispered with lips trembling.

The man laughed reassuringly. “Be comforted, little one, no such contemplation came unto my ears; it is for thine own sake purely that the words stick on my tongue.”

“Then I fear not to hear, for thou wilt help me bear the sorrow if sorrow is to come. Speak thy mind freely, Rehoboam.”

“I may help thee through hours of shadow when present with thee, but there lieth the trouble,” the other faltered. “But thou shalt be harrowed no longer, I will speak plainly. A matter in connection even with Jesus of Nazareth now calleth me to Egypt, and thou must stay here,

Rachel, with Philemon; else abide in the house of our father in Jerusalem, or with our cousins in Cana."

In the great dark eyes of the Jewess welled tears of distress, but there was strength in her nature beside the weaker qualities, and very soon a smile beamed as sunshine showing from the midst of gray cloud banks. "Give all of the matter, Rehoboam," she said, bravely.

The young man placed an arm about his sister's shoulders as a parent might, drawing her to him whilst complying with this request.

"It is traditional among some that serve in the temple, my sister, that a man, a woman, and a young child escaped to Egypt out of Bethlehem directly after the secret departure of the three Eastern princes, and before the massacre had been decreed by Herod; and as there seemeth no authentic knowledge concerning the matter it appeareth well in the eyes of our father and other keepers of the law, for thy brother to journey to the land of the ancient Pharaohs and, aided by open ear and free hand with gold, try to discover whether there be any truth in the hearsay; for should such be proved, it be possible that Messiah liveth among us now, to be made manifest in due season."

"Thou mightest be on thy quest many months, yet even so I would say unto thee 'God speed,' if so be it, in the end, thy going helpeth the cause of Mary's son," murmured Rachel with averted face. And then of a sudden her eyes brightened. "Mightest thy sister not accompany thee, O Rehoboam," she cried, hopefully; and faintly seeing through the dusk the set of his jaw lines she rapidly continued:

"Multitudes of the daughters of Israel have traversed the same ground, and at seasons when food and raiment were not to be had in the bounty which lieth at my command. And, brother, thou wouldst not be hampered by a woman being continually at thy side, for our father hath friends in Alexandria, whose portals would surely welcome the daughter of Rabbi Elim whenever she did choose therein to tarry."

The one thus entreated stood perfectly silent now, greatly torn at heart. Well he knew the trials and hardships attendant on such a journey, and that the spirit's willingness cannot always counter the failures of the flesh, and Rachel had ever been delicate as a high-bred plant. On the other hand, he foresaw many a lonely hour of shadows for the motherless one if she remained from him for so long a season; for he had ever

been her comrade in pleasure and confidant in sorrow.

The suppliant now felt by intuition that the balances needed but slight pressure on one side or the other to form decision either way, and suddenly an inspiration came to her.

“O Rehoboam, remember the oath thou boundest upon thyself upon the deathbed of our mother; that should a time of need come upon thy sister thou wouldest not withhold aught in thy power to give. The time is even at hand for thee to keep that word.”

For an instant a flood of emotion shook the strong form now in silhouette against the roof's railing in the silvered light of the moon; then was the decision rendered in tones low and clear. “Thou mayest accompany thy brother, Rachel, if so be it our father will consent.”

The small figure nestled very close to the big one. “Thou hast ever been good unto me,” the former whispered through the night stillness; and then was subjoined, “Leave father unto my management, Rehoboam. Questions of the law and ruling of nations are men's portion; but certain matters a woman handleth best.”

And this last statement was not denied.

CHAPTER III

“Ask, and it shall be given you.”—*Matthew 7. 7.*

ON the first day of the week the gate-watch had scarce heralded the first hour as a small train of donkeys halted by the great stone archways, the valves of which were yet uncompleted. There were five beasts in all, four bearing human freight, while one was well laden with a journey's equipment. The young Jew astride the leading ass held the Roman guard in converse a moment.

“Have many keepers of the Passover yet passed from Cæsarea Philippi and the lesser towns?” he inquired, as much out of desire to be friendly as from curiosity.

“An innumerable multitude of them,” grunted the helmeted one, laconically.

“And I make no doubt near every Jew of Tiberias is on the road.”

“Thou hast it right! By Bast, a pack of fools I say, to travel eight hundred stadia or more simply to feast,” and the speaker scowled surly, the while pounding the roadway with his spear.

The Hebrew's black eyes glinted with a rebellious anger, but the passion was quickly controlled. "Let us move on, Tobiah," he spoke, turning to an old and faithful bondman, a dark-skinned son of Ishmael; whereupon the latter urged his beast to the rear of the cavalcade and in this order the little company started its pilgrimage, master leading and mistress close behind, while serving maid and man brought up the rear.

For some while they progressed in silence, save for the click of the animals' hoofs upon paving and now and again the frightened squawking of a domestic fowl loose upon the highway. A trifle over six miles according to modern measurement, the road skirted the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and the season being that of nature's renewing, the tender bloom of the orchards and the half-budded promise of the vineyards turned the salty air to a perfume more rare than finest incense.

"Most truly the Lord hath given his chosen nation a land flowing with milk and honey," the leader spoke at length to the heavily veiled damsel directly behind him. "And where honey is, there also must be present insects which sting," he finished, the while his clear-cut upper lip curling.

“As we are of the chosen people what mattereth Rome’s tyranny, O brother?” the one addressed responded. “Had not our fathers far worse plight in the land of the Pharaohs?”

“They were given hope in Moses, finally to gain freedom by his hand. But for us there is not a Moses.”

“And is not the quest thou art now entered upon even to prove a possibility of there being alive in Israel One greater than Moses?” now was inquired very gently.

“Our father, the Tarsian, and others of the rabbis have a notion the matter will otherwise be proven; therefore the motive may be for such finish,” was the noncommittal response.

“Is the latter object thine, Rehoboam?” there was a quaver in the questioner’s tones.

For a long instant the answer remained ungiven. To the man memories came flooding of a certain Youth whose wonderful personality had claimed his adoration in childhood’s days, and an inward counselor whispered, “Would’st thou not have such an one King of the Jews?”

At last the handsome head of the young Hebrew tossed back, and he drew in great lungfuls of the rich atmosphere, as though the act might clear the fog upon his brain.

"I will not answer the question now, my sister," he said. "The head dictateth that one greater in arms than the Cæsars must arise to deliver the sons of Abraham and be their king; and, above all, the Nazarene is a man of peace."

"How doth thy heart dictate, brother?" and in her eagerness to catch the response the interrogator drew back the veil from her face, for there was no unfriendly eye at hand to see.

Without hesitation the response came. "The heart burneth to follow and serve one merciful and just and righteous: a godlike man, in virtue so peerless that all in his kingdom that were faithful might become in spirit and in truth sons and daughters of Jehovah through the example and influence of their great leader." Thus spoke Rehoboam, giving voice unconsciously to the soul cry of fallen and repentant man from Adam's day. Then a smile lightened the expression of his face as he finished; "Yea, my Rachel, even such an one as might have matured from the youth thy brother worshiped in seasons past. But speak, sister; how may the dictates of mine heart be reconciled to those of mine intellect—canst thou solve the problem?"

Rachel shook her head. "Only the Lord God hath wisdom for it," she whispered, closing the

silken mesh before her face with motion expressive of great sadness: and her voice sounded almost inaudibly from behind the folds. "Day and night shall my petitions rise unto heaven, beseeching Him to convince thee that thy heart must have dominion."

So the matter closed, and little did the fond sister dream of the refining trial which must precede the working of the miracle for which she prayed.

CHAPTER IV

“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”—Romans 9. 6.

AT the town of Sennabris the highway led from the sea, and parallel with the River Jordan; and as it was now the flood season, many a glimpse of foaming cataract and whirlpool gave a touch of wildness to the majestic beauty of the hill country. Rehoboam had no desire to hasten the journey, as it was not often they traveled abroad together, Jewish women of the higher class being usually content to abide at home except on special occasions; and what with pauses for enjoyment of the landscape and a brief halt for refreshment at noon, it was well past the tenth hour when Scythropolis was reached; a village set upon the borders of Samaria. At this point accommodation was sought at the khan (public inn) for the night, but the large court surrounding the building was already crowded with pilgrims for the Passover, and for a season it seemed doubtful whether such might be had.

“Do thou stay with thy mistress and Philemon whilst I seek the steward,” Rehoboam said to his Arabian bondman.

Scarce a moment elapsed, however, before he reappeared, followed by a troop of relatives. “Behold, sister!” he cried. “Abimelech, Sinai, and Raphael, from Cana, are here, and Aunt Korah is with our uncle, inside, preparing refreshment. Do thou make haste to them with our store, Philemon, for we shall sup together.”

A black-haired damsel, tall and vivacious, embraced Rachel, the while her eyes flashed in the direction of the man. Thereupon, a sinewy fellow, big and rawboned, also made attempt to salute the cheek of Rabbi Elim’s daughter, but the latter slipped from his grasp with scant ceremony, quickly stepping to where a pathetically fragile and youthful appearing young man leaned against a gate of the court.

“May the God of our fathers be praised that thou wast also able to come to the Passover, Cousin Raphael,” she greeted, touching lightly his forehead with her lips. And the smile which illuminated his marvelously beautiful countenance amply repaid the demonstration.

The hulking fellow, thus openly spurned, laughed uproariously. “By the Well of Jacob,

it were worth being lame to receive that greeting," he guffawed. "But I swear by my right hand to sit by my fair cousin to feast," with which sally he strode off to notify his parents of the addition to their banquet.

Board was spread for the little company in a recess of a great rough-hewn chamber, the only furnishings of which were what the travelers and pilgrims it harbored were pleased to fetch with them. Each circle of guests spread its own mats to rest upon, nor could complain if aught were lacking; but the group presided over by Rabbi Mahalaleel was well furnished with all things needed for the occasion.

When the appetites of all were appeased somewhat, conversation became more the center of interest. The giant Abimelech had made good his vow to have place by Rachel and was not slack at making the most of his advantage.

"Hast thou not tired of thine hermitage at Tiberias, fair cousin?" he bantered, continuing more seriously: "Mayhap thou and Rehoboam are reconsidering the matter of coming to Cana to reside in my father's house."

The one addressed involuntarily shifted position a trifle away from the speaker. "We remain well satisfied to abide in Tiberias," she replied, simply.

“Weigh thy words, sister; for our actions belie thy speech.” Rohoboam smiled at this point.

The large, deep-sunken eyes of Rabbi Mahala-leel now focused upon the girl. He was a man well on in years, of great thought and still greater kindness.

“Interpret the matter, Rachel,” he bade, benignly.

“The subject hingeth upon Jesus of Nazareth, and the telling might prove over long for the occasion,” the one thus admonished murmured lowly, adding, “But if all present truly desire to hear, I beseech my brother to be the narrator that the topic may be well handled.”

The face of the old man lighted with interest. “All in connection with the Nazarene meaneth much to me,” he said, quite oblivious to the fact that other parties feasting in the chamber were listening with interest. “I pray thee, Rehoboam, stay not thy tongue.”

Enjoined thus, the son of Rabbi Elim proceeded to explain, in tones so subdued they could not be distinguished beyond the circle they were intended to reach.

“Well thou knowest, O uncle, that many of the priests and doctors of the law do hold much against this Jesus because he claimeth to be

Messiah and is thus hailed by some of the humble and unlettered sons of Jacob."

The countenance of the ancient rabbi now showed sadness, and raising his right hand—delicate and finely molded as any woman's—he interrupted with half query and half declaration: "Hath not Isaiah spoken in prophecy, 'He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'? Surely, it seemeth as though some of the lettered in Israel are least fit to keep the sacred writings in these latter days; for I believe their interpretation of certain portions of the Scriptures cannot hold in truth with the simple understanding of God's Word given unto many a shepherd of the hills. But do thou continue, son of my brother."

Rehoboam now addressed himself directly to the last speaker, as a manner of bored impatience was plainly shown by all the other members of the latter's household, save one, from the moment the Nazarene became the center of discussion, the exception being Raphael, the cripple.

"To continue, my uncle! Whilst Rachel did abide at thy house for the marriage feast in Cana, the son of Rabbi Elim held council in Jerusalem with his father and others, the question for consultation being even that which now stirreth the

heart of multitudes in Israel, to wit, Is it possible, according to all fulfillment of prophecy, that Messiah may now be among us?"

The speaker's voice now grew more tensely earnest, and lower also. "Thou, a master in Israel, doth know of the pilgrimage to David's City made some thirty years ago by three great princes of the East, whose stated object was the worshiping of one born King of the Jews?"

"Yes, verily, the thing is known, and much considered in mine heart," responded the eager listener. "And to thee it hath been revealed for a special purpose. Proceed."

"Even as the facts of this strange pilgrimage were made known unto me, so wast disclosed that the noble strangers found a babe lying in a manger in a cave of the khan in Bethlehem, unto whom they did homage." Rehoboam spoke more slowly, that all in the immediate little circle might understand the moment of his words.

"Then it surely is proven that the Christ now liveth," interposed the cripple at this point, his face glowing with joy.

The other smiled tolerantly, as one might upon a child. "Thou wert expected to thus speak, cousin; for thy aptitude to believe the best in all things, at once, without question, is well known

by all thy kindred. But if thou knowest it not, thy father here will verify the truth of the statement, that directly after the three wise ones had departed whence they came, Herod, being mindful that there should be no other king of the Jews alive but himself, slew all children of two years and under in Bethlehem and all the coasts thereof."

"And my brother, in revealing unto thee these things, would show that the carpenter of Nazareth could not be Messiah, for his age is known to be thirty years, and the Scriptures say Christ shall come out of Bethlehem of Judæa," broke forth the rabbi. "Did he not tell thee also of a tradition to the purport that after the worshiping of the babe, a man, a woman, and a young child did escape from David's town into Egypt ere the foul decree of Herod was executed?"

"Yea, my uncle, and therefore am I now commissioned to journey through the land of Egypt a season to gain facts concerning this tradition, if such are to be obtained. And so is explained that matter which did begin our discourse, for my sister desireth greatly to accompany her brother on his quest; yet otherwise she spoke truly to Abimelech that our abiding place in Tiberias is yet very grateful to us."

As the explanation reached this climax a very audible sniff of intolerance sounded from the consort of Rabbi Mahalaleel, a large Jewess of very arrogant manner. "I had given thy father credit for possessing more sense than hath been shown in the sending thee on such an errand, nephew," the latter personage drawled through a beaklike nose. "Well he knoweth that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah will be a far different sort of one from this man of Galilee. But since thou art bound to go, surely it were better that thy sister remained with us at Cana."

"Without a doubt thou must return to Cana with us, fair cousin," Abimelech loudly indorsed.

But Rachel shook her head vehemently. "I will go with Rehoboam as far as Alexandria, there to tarry at the house of a friend of our father's whilst the quest is followed," she said, whereupon making haste to add: "If so be it father will consent; and my belief is that the matter will transpire so."

The calm blue eyes of the rabbi now fixed intent gaze upon his nephew's face.

"Dost thou believe in Jesus of Nazareth, thou son of the House of Judah?" he inquired, anxiously; the words reaching many ears besides those for which they were especially intended.

During an instant of silence which now ensued perhaps every soul in the great chamber waited with bated breath for the answer that would come; for in all Israel there was now not a question to hold in interest with the simple interrogation, "Dost thou believe in Jesus of Nazareth?"

The rich hue of health which was wont to glow in Rehoboam's face now perceptibly deepened. Well he knew of the antagonism recently developed among the Pharisees and Sadducees in general against all who spoke in favor of the Nazarene, and he himself being of the former sect, it behooved him to have a care as to the response which was given; but Rabbi Elim's son was one not accustomed to evade the telling of the truth as it appeared to him.

"It were most easy to believe if the head did but allow the heart to reign, my uncle," he at last said, unflinchingly, in a voice full and clear. "Thou recallest the admiration which swelled for him in mine early years of youth? From that time we have not met face to face, yet, according to all hearsay, his character now is not changed one jot or tittle for the worse. But in these latter days the posterity of Jacob are being so swayed hither and yon by diverse teachers, reason dictateth me to prove beyond question the truth of

the claims of this last one before following in his train."

"Well said, cousin," the damsel Sinai interposed at this point. "And if proof be sought in Egypt, thou wilt return from thence with heart and head both clear for the worshiping of Messiah when he truly cometh, for even my father will acknowledge that this Nazarene doth openly refuse to prove unto the scribes his right to the throne of David, proclaiming that all who believe in him must follow through faith and love—as though such virtues had aught to do with the deliverance of Israel!" And the speaker's eyes snapped scornfully.

"My faith in Mary's son liveth because virtue proceedeth from him even more freely than doth evil from others who would be great among the chosen of the Lord; and in mine eyes he doth fulfill the testimony of the prophets," now spoke Rabbi Mahalaleel with simple conviction.

"So liveth my faith in him, O uncle," came lowly from Rachel.

And now a light glorified the face of the cripple. "I have ever loved the carpenter of Nazareth," he whispered, quickly to add: "O that I may see him at the Passover face to face!"

At this last speech a very demon seemed to work Abimelech's repellent features. "Thou art

a fool, Raphael, and hadst best keep silent," he rasped.

Perceiving that her first-born and favorite son was appearing at disadvantage in the eyes of his cousins, the rabbi's wife now hastened to explain the situation.

"As do some few others, my younger son doth believe a miracle to have been truly wrought at the marriage feast at Cana, although he was not present at the festivity to gain right judgment thereby; and now a notion possesseth him that the so-called wonder-worker might even make him whole. And these childish ideas greatly disturb Abimelech," she finished, complacently.

"I also believe that the Nazarene hath power to take the affliction from Raphael; for I was at the marriage feast, and do know that a marvelous thing was there done." The daughter of Rabbi Elim spoke earnestly.

An expression of annoyance now strongly traced Rehoboam's brow. He detested Abimelech and saw that the latter's opinion bid fair to be weighed against that held by Rachel, and in all probability to the latter's outbalancing in the eyes of the many strangers in the chamber at all events.

"Come with me, sister! Thou and Philemon

must prepare accommodations for rest this night, for we will need our strength early to-morrow," he suggested, accompanying the words with a meaningful look upon the object of their direction.

The entire company presided over by Rabbi Mahalaleel now arose, and the countenance of the ancient doctor of the law shone with good will as he turned toward his brother's children.

"Thou wilt join our caravan for the remaining journey to Jerusalem?" he inquired with sincere invitation contained in his tone.

"If thou and thy house wilt make headquarters for the Passover at my father's mansion in David's City," returned Rehoboam in the same spirit of hospitality.

And thus the matter was arranged.

CHAPTER V

"Behold, the kingdom of God is within you."—*Luke 17. 21.*

THE donkey is a leisurely moving beast, but as this small animal is possessed of much endurance he can transport a pack over a longer journey in the hill country in a shorter time than could a horse, and find pasture where the latter animal could not. Although the enlarged caravan now led by Rabbi Mahalaleel was well satisfied with a moderate gait, the third day of the week was still young as the walls of Jericho were sighted. The Roman road did not pass through this ancient city, however, avoiding it by bearing a little to the west as the traveler moves southward.

At this point the highway began to fill with pilgrims for the Passover, and to Rachel and her crippled cousin the many types of humanity, and clatter and chatter which necessarily attended such a concourse, were of engrossing interest, as rarely did either of them travel abroad. From childhood a strong fellow feeling and sense of understanding had existed between the two and

the daughter of Rabbi Elim comprehended and respected the man's sensitiveness concerning his affliction as did no one of his family, save perhaps the gentle Rabbi Mahalaleel, and in turn the deeply spiritual nature of Raphael was a great joy to the other's soul. It was quite natural for them to seek each other's company a good deal on the journey to Jerusalem, and although Abimelech the bold neglected not to push his attentions, yet two persons of a mind can sometimes accomplish more than a single will, even though the two possessed of the one impulse may be but a maiden and a cripple.

It was about the tenth hour when the suburbs of the Holy City began to grow apparent to the travelers, and through no little maneuvering on their own part, Rachel and Raphael were then riding side by side, with Rehoboam next in line.

“A marvelously beautiful way is that to the city of the Great King,” almost subconsciously the former spoke as the tenderly green slopes of Olivet at last ceased to rise before them, and lo! the gilded temple—object of glorification to the Jews—showed clear-cut in the distance as a golden nugget glittering upon the breast of Mount Moriah.

“Fit way, in truth, for unto Zion goeth the

wealth of the world and the princes of it," Rehoboam said, having caught his sister's remark.

"And should the Prince of Peace be even now among us, he will also come this way unto the throne of his father David. 'And the government shall be upon his shoulders,' for so saith Isaiah," dreamily murmured Raphael.

"First the Prince must wage war, to gain his peace," returned the son of Rabbi Elim with conviction.

"Would the conquering by arms bring peace to the hearts of all?" Rabbi Mahalaleel now mildly inquired.

The strongly fashioned features of the young Hebrew showed great conviction as he answered: "In truth, not to the vanquished, my uncle. But is not Messiah to be King of the Jews? To bring only to the chosen people peace and glory?"

"Then, son of my brother, how saith Zechariah, 'In that day saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbor under the vine and under the fig tree'?"

A long moment ensued with no response forthcoming; and then the voice of Raphael came low and sweet: "When the Christ cometh shall not all that love and serve him be his chosen and find peace, whether they be Jew or Gentile? For it is

also written, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' "

At this juncture a rasping chuckle issued from Abimelech, who had drawn forward to join in the discussion. "The little fool expecteth peace to be brought by love," he derided. "Such teaching is sometimes given unto children, but a touch of the scourge is better even for them to my way of thinking."

"Thou expresseth my feelings exactly, brother!" here interposed Sinai with unction.

Rich blood now glowed in Rachel's cheeks with anger. "Raphael's conception of Messiah is the highest, for only Jehovah himself could bring to this world peace through love," she exclaimed, vehemently, her dark eyes flashing.

"If we would enter the city of the Lord dis- coursing of peace, let us in truth have such virtue in our hearts, my children," admonished the aged doctor of the law, soothingly. "Mine own spirit believeth even as Rachel and Raphael: that all who will love and serve Messiah may become his chosen. But let us compose ourselves to enter worshipfully upon the keeping of the Passover, for it is unto the Lord."

As the cavalcade now silently followed the way

past the ancient garden of Solomon, and the tombs of Jehoshaphat and Absalom, toward the Horse Gate, an expression of deep gloom encompassed the fine lineaments of the last speaker, and when the city walls at last loomed massive at hand he hardly saw the keeper of the gate, so deep was his reverie. The temple continued to show great and glorious, high upon the hill to the right, and thoughts in connection with it greatly saddened the old man.

“Would that I were yet able to serve in the Lord’s house,” he muttered at length. “For truly a better understanding of matters great and deep seemeth to have been given the feeble and useless one than hath been portioned to the Masters in Israel strong with manhood.”

The low spoken words reached Raphael and he urged his steed very close to the leader, thence laying a tender arm across the withered shoulder of his father.

“Truly thou hast ever been good to me,” he whispered. “And in these last years when mother hath been so filled with pride in the strength of Abimelech, and the health and beauty of Sinai, where would have been place for the lame one if thou hadst not been near? It was thy words of encouragement and acts of kindness that were

more than life to me in many a dark hour, O my father! And so surely as Jehovah liveth I tell thee thou hast well ministered."

A look of ineffable joy now transfigured the other's countenance.

"Even as was Benjamin to Jacob, so thou art unto me—the younger and beloved son," he said.

CHAPTER VI

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God."—*Revelation 12. 17.*

AS the train of Rabbi Mahalaleel halted at the Horse Gate to show passports to the Roman guards, and pay for the entering in of each beast of burden attendant, a most heterogeneous and vociferous concourse surrounded them. The place was cluttered with venders' stalls; and the discordant cries of merchants proclaiming their multitudinous varieties of wares mingled with the harsh rasping of geese, braying of donkeys, barking of dogs, and bleating of sheep—which mighty uproar seemed but fit accompaniment to the general exhibition. An endless stream of the children of Israel emptied in from the north to gradually disperse through the narrow streets of the city of their fathers. Relatives near and far removed, and friends holding place in all the gradations in the scale of warmth within the breast, were being fervently embraced in each other's arms, or saluted upon the cheeks, or clasped by the right hand to have the said digit carried to breast and forehead and lips, as the case of salu-

tation might require. The scene was one calculated to rouse excitement of feeling in the most phlegmatic temperament, and especially did it hold the eager attention of the unsophisticated daughter of Rabbi Elim and her crippled cousin, for both possessed a deep and sympathetic interest in others. After a short season's halt amid this chaos of activity, Rabbi Mahalaleel headed straight for the upper city where his brother's house was situated.

The mansion in question was as near a counterpart of numberless others owned by the wealthy in Jerusalem as one pea is like unto the remaining contents of the pod. It was square and massive in outer aspects, absolutely devoid of windows in the first story, but inclosing spacious courts open to the sky, which latter afforded ample ventilation and light for the dwellers therein. In answer to Rehoboam's summons upon the outer wicket, a gray-haired serving woman appeared who immediately prostrated herself upon discovering the identity of the guests.

"Rise, Leah, and greet thy husband," the young man spoke kindly, for the prostrate one was the consort of his favorite bondman Tobiah, and many a time had he slumbered peacefully in her arms as a babe.

The party now proceeded forward led by the scion of the house, and after crossing a paved passage entered an open court where fountains and shrubbery lent charm to stone seats which were built in nooks and corners invitingly. From one of these arched bowers a tall, powerfully built man with rather stern lineaments stepped forth, clad in flowing vestments of a master in Israel, for it was Rabbi Elim himself.

“Welcome, brother, and all thine house; and thou also, O son and daughter,” the scribe greeted, an expression of sincere pleasure softening his countenance. “By the gold upon the altar I swear not to have expected the pleasure in such fullness; for here even is Raphael, who hath not traveled so far abroad this many a year; and Rachel my well-beloved; one whose persistence in remaining from her father’s house hath caused much anxiety to him. Is thy sorrow so far overcome that thou canst now abide here in Jerusalem, daughter?” the man inquired, drawing the damsel to him with gentle movement.

At this point Rehoboam’s lips opened to speak, but at a covert sign from his sister the words were stifled.

“For the eating of the Passover I am here, O father, but to stay not longer,” Rachel trembled,

lowly; and then in louder voice that all her kindred might surely hear: "I would speak privately with thee upon the matter; let us not open the subject now."

On the fourteenth day of the month, toward eventide, the holy convocation gathered in the temple according to the command given unto Moses, the servant of the Lord; and by the same injunction the peaceful and quiet spirit of the Sabbath should have rested upon the souls of all in Israel at this season. But truthfully it must be said that Sabbath stillness encompassing the multitude foregathered on this their great eve of memorial penetrated to the souls of but a sadly scant number of them; and this woeful state of degeneration had not passed by two of the guests at the house of Rabbi Elim.

Over indulgence of a fond mother had nurtured in Abimelech and Sinai a natural spirit of willfulness which had been born in them, till at adult's age they had developed into as selfish and light-minded a pair as might well be imagined. So soon as their father and uncle had departed to attend the convocation at the temple these two settled themselves to gratify their own personal enjoyment.

During this season Rachel retired to the cham-

ber which had been hers in erstwhile days; and memories of the cherished mother thence came crowding close. Everything about her brought them trooping; the squat, carved-legged stools with which she had played in childhood; the low, heavily draped divan that had oft given place of soothing for the little child nestled in the mother's arms; even the seamed rafters of the ceiling, and high window arches in the rooms in the upper stories of the house seemed to whisper of moments of joy which could be no more in this world; and under the strain of it the one thus brooding buried her face in cushions that in other days had brought ease and comfort, weeping as though her heart would break.

But the daughter of Rabbi Elim was not long overcome with the weakness of her sorrow; very soon she uprose and, after laving face and hands in cooling and perfumed waters, composed herself for a quiet season of study of the sacred writings.

For a time the student remained undisturbed, and then sounded a loud rap upon the chamber door. When invitation to enter was given Sinai flounced into the apartment and immediately took full possession of the comforts of the divan, clasping her bejeweled hands above her head with gesture of nonchalance and grace personified.

"Thou and Raphael are well matched, cousin," the intruder bantered. "He is ever poring over Moses and the Prophets when the world lieth at his feet to enjoy; however, he is lame and much cannot be expected of him; but thou"—and the speaker's heavily penciled brows raised in manner highly expressive.

Rachel ignored the personal implication contained in the latter part of this speech, confining her attention wholly to the subject immediately preceding it.

"Whether much be expected from Cousin Raphael or no, this I say: he hath the patience of a Job, the meekness of a Moses, and barring the affliction which the Lord hath permitted to come upon him, the comeliness of a David." Thus speaking, the full-modeled lips drew to a line most remarkably straight.

An exasperating sneer now expanded the delicately chiseled nostrils of the recumbent one. "Hath it not been well said that thou and he are a seemly pair?" she drawled.

An angry light flashed in the other's eyes at this, but the response was low spoken and controlled.

"Thy words are an offense unto me, Sinai."

"I beseech thy pardon, cousin," now came with

mock humility; but at this point another strident summons for admittance resounded upon the door.

“My elder brother doubtless hath become tired of a man’s company and seeketh that which is more grateful to his sex.” Sinai smiled in tantalizing manner. Then, taking to herself the dominion of the chamber, she bid: “Enter, brother, and be welcome.”

With no ceremony whatever the man complied, appropriating for his huge bulk a mat at the very feet of Rachel; from which place of vantage he might boldly ogle her without let or hindrance.

“One might suppose this to be the holy convocation,” he sacrilegiously chaffed. “For thou hast a sacred scroll in thy hands, O cousin! And bless me, if the entire house seemeth not pervaded with a spirit solemn as the altars in the temple.”

“As thou art a son of the House of Judah, take not thus things pertaining to the Lord in vain,” sternly chided Rachel.

“Well, then, to change the subject, hast thou yet gained consent from thy father to go on the mad chase to Egypt, fair cousin?” The questioner’s tones were light, yet they cloaked a deal of interest nevertheless.

“The matter awaiteth proper season to set be-

fore him, and I fear not the outcome of it," was the calm response.

At this instant a signal passed from brother to sister; just a movement of eyebrows; but it had been prearranged and was instantly understood.

"Excuse my absence for a few moments, cousin," now spoke Sinai, with languid motion rising from the divan. "I would have a word with mother. Dost thou wish Philemon sent?"

"Yea, and thou wilt be so kind; have Philemon sent at once," the other returned.

But ere the intriguing Jewess had departed a second intelligence had passed from eye to eye, and her brother knew that the bondwoman would be long in coming.

CHAPTER VII

“God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”—*1 Corinthians 1. 27.*

IT may be stated that Sinai, upon leaving Rachel's chamber, held intention of fulfilling the obligation self-suggested after a lapse of a goodly season; human calculations are very liable to be upset, however. At a curve in the stairway which led her toward the main court of the building she very unexpectedly came upon Rehoboam, who, with a roll of parchment in hand, was ensconced in a niche in the wall, the panel arches of which very effectually hid him from the view of any person not directly before him.

“By the tombs of the prophets! if such well-fashioned statuary were known abroad to have place in the house of Rabbi Elim, he would in truth be banished from the congregation of Israel,” gaily laughed the damsel. “Art thou also conning Moses and the seers, O cousin? Thy sister was so engaged a season past, but with the intruding of myself and Abimelech, the scriptures did become less engrossing.”

A hot wave of irritation filled the one thus surprised, for he held little patience for the ways of his two shallow-minded cousins, and the situation was annoying. For a moment he quite lost sight of the fact that the obnoxious young woman standing before him was a guest in his father's house.

"Thy speech lacketh due reverence for the holy writings, Sinai, and doth reflect against the upbringing of thy father, who is a good man," he reproved, with tone and manner quite unmixed with softening expression.

The flouted one threw back her handsome head and shoulders haughtily. "And thou lackest due reverence for a lady who is a guest through thine own invitation, son of Rabbi Elim," she spoke with great deliberation; and marking with much inward satisfaction the aspect of deep embarrassment and confusion which her words had brought upon the other's face, she tripped lightly down the remaining flight of stairs before a word of apology might be spoken.

The incensed one now leisurely followed a tiled way that wound about the fountains and verdure of the court, made private for the use of the rabbi and his family and guests of the house. As her gaze tentatively turned this way and that it sud-

denly rested upon the frail form of her crippled brother resting in a secluded nook. In that instant a new idea of mischief was begot.

“Rachel thy cousin would talk with thee a season in her chamber, Raphael,” she said, smiling broadly as the one thus addressed hobbled off with brightened and eager mien.

“If I may not have happiness, neither shall any of them,” chuckled Sinai; thence feeling better satisfied with things in general.

At the portal leading to his cousin’s room Raphael knocked lightly upon the carved wood-work, thence waiting expectant, listening intently for the expected invitation to enter. Naught came to his ears, however, save a muffled murmur of voices which seemed to be rising to a pitch of excitement or anger.

Again he rapped; this time more loudly, and while straining to catch the response which should come, the voice of Rachel came clearly to him, vehemently exclaiming: “Shame upon thee, Abimelech! to thus deport at this special season sanctified by the Lord unto his people!”

Moved by a sudden and wild impulse, the listener threw wide the door, to disclose his brother close to the daughter of Rabbi Elim, one arm encircling her waist, and voice earnestly pleading

in tones modulated to an attempt at tenderness. And vainly was the latter struggling to free herself from these attentions.

For a brief instant Raphael stood inert, with body quivering, and white slender hands clutching the side arches of the portal; and then a cry came from him as from a wounded thing at bay; and he pitched forward, to lie a huddled heap upon the floor.

At this sound of intrusion the huge fellow sprang away from the object of his desires, for at heart he was an arrant coward and had no mind to incur the open animosity of Rehoboam; but at sight of the maimed figure upon the tiling of the floor, with lack of physical strength so pitifully apparent, all that was bestial in him rose to the surface, and in one stride he had his brother by the scruff of the neck, shaking him as a terrier would a rat.

“I’ll teach ye to enter a lady’s chamber uninvited, little fool,” he rasped. “Take that,” and a blow was even descending upon the unresisting form, when something came between; something which seemed with power of fury even as bolted thunder.

“Loose thy brother, son of Cain! Loose him, I say, else it will fare hard with thee, mark me!”

And Rachel fairly dragged the limp body from the hands of the tormentor.

“Now get thee from this chamber, and come nigh it not again uncalled, else thou wilt hear from Rabbi Elim the Strong! and well thou knowest the meaning of that. Begone, I say!”

And as a whipped cur of the streets the giant slunk out.

But Raphael could not be comforted.

“Would that I were whole,” he moaned. “To be a man just one day, it seemeth little to ask, and right—to be in God’s image as he fashioned in the beginning. But the boon is not given unto me.”

“Hush thee, cousin, hush!” Rachel whispered; bending over the cripple soothingly, as though she were his mother. “To me thou dost show forth Jehovah’s strength, with virtue—more than any other, save thy father and Jesus of Nazareth. So hush thee!”

The large, deeply blue eyes of the young man fixed gaze full and steadily upon the flushed and beautiful face of his cousin.

“Thou lovest me truly as a fond mother or sister would,” he spoke, very slowly, adding, “and the younger son of Rabbi Mahalaleel is grateful, for such passion hath never been a surfeit in his life.”

At this point the speaker turned his face away. "Cousin!" he breathed in tones of pleading, "reveal unto me thy heart's conviction upon this matter. Might a woman of noble spirit have for one even such as I, broken in body, a passion greater than a mother's or sister's love? Thou canst comprehend the meaning of the question, answer truly," and the fair countenance inclined yet more away.

For a moment Rachel was silent. "What meaneth he?" she thought. Then inspiration seemed to come to her, and she drew so near him that her black coils of hair mingled with the golden luster which was his crowning.

"Thou shalt hear that which is very near to my heart, O cousin. Listen! A certain virtue, wonderful in its pureness, in mine eyes seemeth to dwell as a shining vestment continually upon the son of Mary of Nazareth. And the presence of this thing hath drawn from my heart its deepest and holiest passion; yea, even such a feeling as I hold for the God of my fathers! and to me thou art more like the Nazarene than any other. Truly, thy spirit is therefore proven to be worthy the best passion of a woman's heart," and at conclusion of this answer a tender arm encircled the man's shoulders.

For one brief moment Raphael remained still in the woman's embrace, and then a trembling passed over him, more violently by far than had torn his being a season past, at the threshold of the room. Then very gently he put aside the clasping arm and limped away.

CHAPTER VIII

“And his name shall be called Wonderful.”—*Isaiah 9. 6.*

NOW was the time of holy preparation; that season of twilight when the altars of the temple in Jerusalem were gory with blood of sacrificial lambs, even the hour when the heart of Israel should have been kindled to a great flame of gratitude and adoration in remembrance of the mighty and stretched forth Hand which had led them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. But woe unto the chosen nation!—the fires kindled in the streets of David’s city to roast the flesh of lambs for their feasting did office for that which should have burned within the breast. Thus was eaten the Passover.

But let it not be forgot, Jehovah is a God of covenant and mercy, and even as there was one righteous soul in Sodom to be saved, so were there still in Israel a faithful few.

When the last vestige of the paschal lamb allotted to the house of Rabbi Elim and its guests was disposed of, Rachel touched the arm of the cripple, and quietly, without attracting the notice

of any other, led him to an upper chamber where opened a broad window casement toward the east. A mood of solemn abstraction had dwelt with Raphael since the shameful incident with his brother, and intuition moved the maiden to take the sensitive one out of the way of possible unkind intrusion; and she knew what soothing to a wounded spirit may come through a communing with God's starlit night, aided by a fellow spirit that silently understands.

After a season the man was strengthened, thence turning with audible speech to his companion, with tones softly vibrating, clearly expressing appreciation of what had been given and received.

"Cousin," he said earnestly, "believest thou the blood sacrificed to-day upon the temple altars doth make the posterity of Jacob without guilt in the eyes of the Lord?"

For a moment the one addressed hesitated, then responded very lowly: "Strange as the speech soundeth, and mayhap blasphemous according to law, the thing is true, nevertheless, since thy father and mine did return from the holy convocation bringing tidings with them of the marvelous words spoken in the temple by Jesus of Nazareth, the hope and comfort contained in the new teaching, and the knowledge that such an one

as the Nazarene dwelleth in Jerusalem this night, doth bring greater peace to the attitude of my soul toward God than could all the blood sacrificed in the temple from the beginning. Therefore I have greater trust in the intercession of that One now claiming to be Messiah than in the keeping of the Passover of our fathers! O, what makest thou of it, cousin?" and the speaker pressed both hands tight against her forehead, as though she would bar from the brain an image that haunted it—image of a certain Face, perfect with sinless majesty.

A smile of infinite joy replaced the erstwhile look of sadness that had dwelt upon the features of the cripple. "The trust newly born in thine heart is with me also," he whispered. "And recallest thou not, O Rachel, the words of recognition spoken by the prophet of the desert concerning this same Jesus?"

"Yea, the speech was reported far through Galilee: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'—those were the very words."

"Then did not the prophet himself accord the office of the sacrificial lamb to the Nazarene? and not only for the sons of Abraham but for the world?"

Even by the dim light of the stars shining

through the window the rapt eagerness in the eyes of the speaker was made manifest to the daughter of Rabbi Elim.

"Surely, thy heart and mine have been gained by the son of Mary of Nazareth," she said, earnestly, adding, "Then are we his disciples indeed; even though we may not follow in his train as do a certain small company of men. O let us beseech the Lord of Hosts to incline our hearts to his will in this matter, cousin."

With faces turned toward the temple, side by side they knelt by the open window, for they were quite alone in the apartment, and the man's voice vibrated with ardency of feeling. "Jehovah, great God of thy chosen race," he prayed, "harken unto the supplication of thy weak servants and show forth a light upon the way thou wouldest have them follow. A great darkness encompasseth Israel, even at this day, and the sons and daughters thereof do stumble and fall in their blindness! O, bid the Star that shall rise out of Jacob to come in his glory to reveal thy will unto men and establish righteousness upon the earth. And if so be we now can say even as prophesied thy servant Isaiah, 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given,' incline our hearts to know him, that even we may fulfill thy word, and call his name Wonderful."

Hand in hand the two uprose, and for the third time that day a trembling took hold of Raphael. But now it was ecstasy that filled him beyond containing.

“Truly, the Lord hath not left us in darkness, O Rachel!” he breathed, “for from the beginning truth was his Holy Word, and his Word was truth; and in truth my tongue now speaketh, from Moses unto Zechariah there hath not arisen one with spirit and works so worthy to be called wonderful as are shown freely forth by Jesus of Nazareth.”

Without further utterance the man raised the woman’s palm to his forehead and his lips; then they parted for the night.

/ CHAPTER IX

"Blindness in part is happened to Israel."—*Romans 11. 25.*

THE hour came when Rabbi Elim was closeted alone with his daughter in deep debate, and the heavy creases between the black brows of the former clearly bespoke a vehemence in the maintaining of his attitude in the matter. A touch of paternal impatience had even accelerated the wonted measure of his voice.

"Thou and Rehoboam wert allowed to reside at Tiberias, the Roman city unclean, much against my will, seeing that weak fancies begot the notion of it, Rachel!" The man spoke in tones slowly but surely growing conclusive, then continuing: "But this last request thou canst not have. There are many evils to threaten thee upon the desert, from wild beast or man more wild," and the heavily bearded jaw clicked shut in manner highly expressive of finality.

The pleader had one remaining dart to throw, however, and she aimed it true.

"O, father, let remembrance come unto thee of the few moments immediately preceding the passing of the mother greatly beloved. Dost thou

recall what then occurred between us?" and the speaker's gaze fixed upon the other's face deeply eloquent.

Rabbi Elim the Strong cleared his throat, and for an instant turned away.

"Why put such a question, child?" he muttered, finally. "Thou knowest the memory departeth not whilst I live."

"Thou didst then swear by the gift upon the altar never to do aught against the good of thine only daughter," was returned unfalteringly.

The man had been standing by a heavily fashioned table sharply rapping its surface with his knuckles. He now sat down upon a stool and violently stroked his beard.

"Hath the oath been violated, my daughter?" he asked, in tones which vainly strove to be even.

"Never yet in the sight of God, my father. But in truth I now say it, to be forced to remain in Tiberias alone for so long a season would be indeed unkindness to me; to abide long in this house would turn the sorrowing of my spirit to madness; and thought of dwelling at Cana in the house of my uncle seemeth nearly as unendurable as either, for the attentions of Abimelech are an abomination to my soul. So there remaineth for me naught but Egypt with my brother; and as multitudes of

the daughters of Abraham have taken that journey in times more troublous than these, surely it is not too hard for me."

The rabbi again beat a tattoo upon the table. "A plague upon it, Rachel, thou leavest no way open unto me but to consent; though in the matter of thy cousin's attentions, what could be more seemly and fit? However, such matters are best left awhile unhurried; so depart! thou hast prevailed."

Thus was proved a second time that a strong man's conviction may be quickly shattered by a cry of weakness from a woman.

Immediately after the expiration of the Jews' seven-days' feast of unleavened bread, Rehoboam and Rachel, with their two faithful attendants, bade farewell to the kindred in Jerusalem, and having exchanged the erstwhile small beasts of burden for six long-limbed, odd-gaited ships of the desert, they entered upon the journey toward Egypt well equipped to meet any ordinary emergency.

From the Jaffa Gate the way became quite elevated, running parallel with the aqueduct and bounded by beautiful swelling hills, to the town of Bethlehem. At this place the daughter of Rabbi Elim earnestly requested a brief halt at the khan.

“Since thou toldest me how three great princes did worship a babe newly born in a manger, O brother, my heart hath burned for mine eyes to see the lowly cradle; for I do believe the place hath been sanctified by the Lord,” she pleaded. And there being no urgency for hurry, a consent was given.

Under the inducement of a piece of silver the confidence of the steward of the premises was gained; and upon being briefly told of Rachel’s desire he smiled good-humoredly, the while leading down a sloping courtyard to where a mass of limestone protruded from the hill.

“My father hath often spoken of such occurrence,” he said; adding sagely, “and the matter hath been rightly judged to be the outcome of a superstition held by the three Eastern strangers. Howbeit, here is the cave which harboreth the cattle and sheep, and here the mangers in one of which was born the child.”

With but scant curiosity, and no thought of reverence whatever, Rehoboam, a son of the House of Judah, gazed upon the holy place which first sheltered the Lion of the chosen tribe.

“What blasphemy even to suppose in thought that the heaven-anointed One, the King of the Jews, might have been cradled here!” he scoffed

with disdainful curl of lip. "The shepherd's bed upon the hillslopes would be a place more fit because more sweetly appointed."

But Rachel gazed with wide and tender eyes upon the hollows formed of stone and cement wherein the beasts were fed. "May it not be Jehovah hath some great teaching hid in these things which seem to us so strange, O brother?" she whispered. "Thou knowest that John of the desert did proclaim Jesus of Nazareth to be the Lamb of God; and if he is such in truth, then a manger doth not seem wrongly appointed to be his place of nativity."

With a shrug of the shoulders the man turned the question off. "Thou art already convinced that a man, a woman, and a young child did escape to the land of the ancient Pharaohs ere the babes of Bethlehem were slain, my sister." He smiled. "Nevertheless our father and some others have not yet such conviction; so let us tarry here no longer; else thy faith persuade me also and I fail to perform my present mission."

And so the man turned from the sign which was God-given to proclaim an Infant God, to follow the dictates of man's wisdom, dictates which were to lead him on a course long and hard.

CHAPTER X

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."—*Matthew 25. 40.*

THE small caravan now followed the ridges southward, obtaining an ample supply of living water for all requirements from a line of wells, or water-holes—some fifteen in number—which had been dug in the time of the patriarchs. Those that journeyed through this vicinity were wont to gauge the extent of a day's travel by the distance to the next well, and at many points even in Judæa the precious liquid must needs be transported, as there were reaches of arid plain differing but little in aspect from the immense sun-scorched limestone plateau known as the Wilderness of Paran, which latter must be crossed ere the sands of Egypt were gained.

Rehoboam was quite undisturbed by anticipation of difficulty in obtaining water sufficient for his party's need, however, especially for the fore part of the journey; nevertheless trouble often comes by avenues imagined to be most safely guarded.

Toward the end of the third day's travel from Jerusalem the cavalcade entered the Wilderness of Zin, a narrow length of barren land bordered by bleak hills. Southward the parched plain stretched to the horizon, traced with multitudinous lines of shadow where wadies were formed by swelling ridges of earth-covered limestone.

At this point in the journey Rachel turned to her brother a bravely smiling face to proclaim half interrogatively in tones wistful in spite of all efforts to the contrary, "In yonder burning waste oasis doth not hide to make glad a favored season of rest, O brother!"

"Thou art mistaken, sister," was the heartening rejoinder. "As the sun setteth on the morrow we should reach a valley indeed pleasant to the eye and sense; even the Wells of Qadees, where Moses tarried near forty years, and from whence Israel did march for the conquest of Canaan. At that place we tarry a short season to be refreshed for the hard days which will follow."

"In truth, the uncomely and torrid-appearing desert which confronteth us doth not show to mine eyes possibility of containing such paradise," the other amazedly affirmed, to subjoin happily: "Nevertheless, faith in thy statement shall minister to my soul until the evening of the morrow."

The fair promise held forth proved not to have been made without grounds, for even at the season foretold suddenly, almost as if by supernatural command, a beautiful valley opened to view, having for its life a sparkling stream of water which wound about new-budded shrubs and trees, nourishing full-bladed grass to wonderful verdancy. Many-hued birds and butterflies flashed and fluttered through the air, while the droning of bees carried the enraptured travelers in fancy back to the fertile slopes of Galilee.

“So must have seemed the Garden of the Lord to the first pair upon the earth,” Rachel murmured in ecstasy. “Little wonder the children of Israel lacked spirit to leave such place to war against the terrors of unknown might.”

“Faith in the promises of Jehovah should have been all in all unto them,” the man returned.

“Yea, verily, as should be the case unto this day,” now came lowly. “But canst thou affirm, O brother, that faith over their reason now hath dominion?”

And the one addressed could not so affirm, for certain aspects of the mission that he was upon disproved it.

After a day and two nights’ refreshment in the wonderful valley of Kadesh Barnea, the journey

toward Egypt was again entered upon by Rachel with greatly renewed strength of spirit. The season being that of earliest summer, the desert breezes were not yet pregnant with torrid malignancy even at noon tide, and as the camels could maintain their wonderful gently rocking pace for many hours without tiring, to recline in a cushioned and awninged houdah and doze or ruminante as fancy might dictate was not a very irksome or difficult occupation.

After a certain short season of indulgence in the first-mentioned diversion the daughter of Rabbi Elim parted the draperies which sheltered her to take an observation of the surroundings.

It was near the sixth hour of the second day out from the oasis of refreshment, and in three directions the wilderness showed sear and desolate; while to the left the brown ridge of the Jebel el-Tih stretched snakelike into the southwestern horizon. The remainder of the party had been lulled to the same state of pleasant semiconsciousness which a few moments ago had dwelt with herself. Even the leader, Rehoboam, was trusting to the keen intelligence and sense of locality possessed by his steed to keep the caravan in its proper course, and drawing a deep sigh of resignation the one making inspection was about to reclose the houdah cur-

tains when a minute object, barely discernible upon the plain southward, drew her attention.

"A party of travelers approacheth, in all likelihood well-meaning like unto ourselves," she mused. "Nevertheless it were best for me to make the matter known, for bands of ill-minded Arabs do roam the desert seeking plunder."

At this point the cogitations were given audible voice:

"Brother, see! Far before us an object lieth upon the plain, and yea, even as we approach it stringeth out to the appearance of a line of camels. What makest thou of it?"

At the first accosting note the man sat bolt upright in his houdah with a jerk, the while his features taking on that inscrutable expression peculiar to persons caught napping and desirous to deny the self-evident fact. Upon regaining full possession of his senses he quite forgot such triviality, however, in the subject which had been presented to him; quickly raising his right hand as a signal for a halt.

"To my vision there show but four beasts; which is two less than we number," he said after an instant of intense scrutiny; thence turning to the bondman close following, "What seest thou, son of the desert?"

The one thus addressed had passed threescore years of age, but in spite of the gray locks which hung to his shoulders, and the deeply wrinkled face, the eyes were still keen and the back unbowed.

“Four dromedaries there be, O my master,” he answered without hesitation; and after a moment of silence had elapsed, added: “And by the tents of my fathers, the largest of them beareth upon his back two riders, whilst one houdah is empty. Beside which there are one driver astride a beast and one camel for pack.”

“A strange showing in truth, for persons may converse with those driving other steeds than their own without placing such burden upon one camel,” Rehoboam muttered.

“Mayhap distress dwelleth with them,” his sister now ventured. And this solution of the problem very shortly proved correct, for when the two parties finally reached hailing distance of each other a woman’s voice came clear and finely modulated, but containing a very evident cadence of anxiety: “In Jehovah’s name, peace unto thee! And may the Lord permit that ye and we are of one nation.”

“As He liveth who brought low the Pharaohs, we are of the chosen race; and may peace return

unto thee sevenfold," responded the son of Rabbi Elim.

The latter's dromedary now stood head to head with the stranger's leading camel, and the man's gaze fixed with expectation upon the curtained houdah before him; for through the light texture of its draperies could be plainly seen that two persons were inclosed therein, even as Tobiah had proclaimed.

And now the silken awnings were drawn aside disclosing a young woman of royal proportions, whose face, however, was hid by the conventional veil; and opposite her in the traveling compartment was the prostrate form of a serving woman.

"My bondwoman, Sibmah, is stricken with fever," again spoke the sweetly modulated voice. "And because of this unexpected drain upon our supply of water there remaineth in the skins but enough to moisten her parched lips; and for Neriah, her husband, and myself, there hath been none since the first hour in the day. Canst thou give succor to our need, O sir?" And at this point the veil was raised a little, showing to the interested listeners a most beautiful face crowned with great coils of lustrous auburn hair.

In a trice Rachel had given command for her camel to kneel, and lightly stepping to the plain,

was at the side of one of the pack camels and reaching for a skin of water.

“Thy need shalt be ministered unto immediately, thou fair one,” she smiled; thence turning to see why her brother had not responded in kind.

It was not often that the latter was disconcerted in his deportment toward a lady, and in the present instance it must be stated that he greatly desired to appear to advantage; but circumstances had placed him in a quandary.

“Most surely thou and thy servants shall receive all the succor we may have power to give,” he at last spoke, somewhat haltingly; and perceiving the wondering look growing in the deeply blue eyes of the stranger he hastened to explain. “Think not, O lady, that I have not heart to do all in my power for thee; the trouble lieth in that we have but little more water than would carry our party to the next well which is far on the path to Egypt, whither we were bound. Howbeit thy life, and the life of thy attendants also, far outweigh all other considerations, so when thou art refreshed we will together return to the wells of Qadees.”

“May the God of our fathers bless thee and thine for being friends indeed unto me this day,” the other returned, earnestly.

During the journey back to the oasis of Kadesh Barnea, Rachel rode as much in the tall stranger's houdah as in her own, relieving the latter in the ministrations to the sick, and from the close intercourse which was thus brought about a deep friendship took root; a friendship which was destined to grow until the vine thereof should extend its fruit of blessing multiplied an hundred-fold to the first giver of benefit.

Early on the way it was revealed that the fair-haired Jewess was one Sarah, bound for Jerusalem, whose home was with an aged uncle residing in Tarsus, for her parents were dead.

When this information was given, Rehoboam, who was riding near the speaker, interestedly inquired, "Knowest thou Saul of Tarsus? He is my friend."

"That do I!" was returned, simply. "He is a Pharisee of the most strict; and did sit at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel."

"For a season so also did my brother," interposed Rachel with a proud light in her eyes; adding by way of further introduction: "Jerusalem is our natal place; but since the passing of mother our father's house did seem to hold memories beyond my heart's containing, therefore these two years past we have dwelt in Tiberias, for my sake."

The last words were spoken in tones slightly quavering, and this was not lost upon the perceptions of Sarah of Tarsus. With a motion tenderly sympathetic she leaned from her place and touched the other's arm, for they were riding side by side.

"Thou hast known sorrow, sister; and thy confidence will be repaid in kind some day; for there lieth a burden upon my spirit also." And then, in answer to an invitation clearly shown in the dark eyes opposite, the speaker concluded: "But the matter cannot be given now; at some later season when we may be alone together, if the Lord permit such time to come."

The condition of the fevered bondwoman improved a little under the efforts of the combined forces ministering to her; but when the fertile valley was reached she still required continual attention, and for several days Rehoboam held his caravan by the wells, loath to leave the strangers in trouble under the circumstances.

But at last it became apparent to all that many days must elapse ere the stricken one might do aught for herself; and slowly a conviction grew upon Rachel—a conviction that there was a duty for her to perform.

And now was fought in her soul a conflict mighty indeed!

Many long hours of the night watches she lay, with face turned to the brightly shining stars, praying to the God of her fathers for guidance and strength to do his will; even as she and Raphael had prayed together on the evening of the Passover; and always there seemed to come as answer words which she had once heard spoken by a certain One:

"By this shall ye know that ye are my disciples, that ye have love one for another," rang the wonderful voice in her consciousness over and over; until one night her spirit moaned with anguish. "Surely, now it doth seem that I am not the disciple of the Nazarene; for mine own desires are more unto me than the great need of this my friend!" And then her lips moved in prayer again.

"O Jehovah! wilt thou give unto thy handmaid grace in this matter to follow the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth? for in truth doth she believe him to be thy Messiah, sent to counsel and govern thy people Israel."

At the conclusion of this supplication sleep came to the inwardly striving one, and in the morning she found the victory over self had been won.

Not long after this brother and sister were for a little season alone in deep converse, sheltered in

a secluded curve of the priceless little stream which gave life to the valley, and a great astonishment was with the man.

"Thou wilt give up the journey to Egypt, and dwell with our cousins in Cana that thou mayest aid this stranger on the way to Jerusalem; and thou wert given strength thus to decide through a saying of Jesus of Nazareth!" he reiterated almost mechanically, under the first stress of amazement. "Dost thou realize the full import of the sacrifice, my sister?"

"To the utmost!" was the low rejoinder.

"That thing which I could not persuade thee to do, being present with thee face to face; nor yet could the will of our father Rabbi Elim the Strong; even where we utterly failed did the influence of this Jesus conquer!"

For a moment the maker of this last statement gazed at the rippling waters before him, nonplussed; then he spoke, more to himself than the other. "What manner of man is this?"

When Rachel's intention was made known to Sarah of Tarsus the latter's regal head bowed with stress of feeling. "Thou hast made me thy debtor through all time, O daughter of Jerusalem," she said, lowly, continuing with much earnestness: "And though I know naught else of this man of

Galilee whom thou dost so honor in connection with thy goodness, yet because of that which he hath caused to be given unto me I say, blessed be his name?"

And the convalescing bondwoman Sibmah, lying upon a bed of mats near, and having overheard all, whispered as an echo of her mistress:

"Blessed be his name."

CHAPTER XI ✓

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace."—*Isaiah 32. 17.*

A SHORT season after Rachel's self-abnegation Rehoboam and his Arabian bondman Tobiah again set forth toward Egypt, and when the little cavalcade at last had vanished from sight in the far distance the former turned from gazing after the departed with a feeling of great depression upon her soul. Now that the strong protecting care of the kind brother was no longer near, a foreboding sense of some impending evil was with her; but she fought it valiantly, soon finding that service gladly rendered to those in need at hand was a mighty agent to dispel disturbing thoughts.

After three days more of refreshment in Kadesh Barnea the patient was in favorable condition to start for Jerusalem, and as the diminished little company traveled leisurely along there was ample opportunity afforded for converse, and the very first subject broached by the Tarsean was concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

“Tell me of this Nazarene, whose counsel hath such power to make thee bless others, O new-found friend!” she besought with sincere interest.

“Is it possible thou hast not heard of him and dwellest so near to Galilee as lieth the city of Tarsus?” the other exclaimed in wonder, to subjoin, “And art acquainted with Saul beside!”

“Two years and more have I journeyed hither and yon, far and wide, on a certain quest which thou shalt hear more of in due season, my sister; but so it transpireth that recent events of importance may have occurred in these parts that I know naught of.”

“That explaineth the matter. And now, concerning thy request: In the town of Nazareth there hath abode these many years a chaste woman of the lineage of David, called Mary, whose elder son, Jesus, hath ever been wonderful with virtue and wisdom, although a carpenter by trade, untaught by the scribes, and till late season being content to abide in his mother’s house. But during a period preceding the beginning of months in the year that is past a prophet appeared upon the banks of the Jordan baptizing for the remission of sins; and on one certain occasion this Jesus came to be baptized also; whereupon the prophet did immediately lift his staff, and pointing to

Mary's son, cried with loud voice, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' And there are some which then stood by which do affirm that when the Nazarene came up out of the water the heavens opened and a dove descended, to alight upon his head; and a voice, as of many waters, proclaimed in tones of divine majesty, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' "

"Most truly a marvelous story," broke forth the listener, able to contain herself no longer. "Can it be that Messiah abideth now even in Judah, without homage and unproclaimed by the servers in the temple?"

"Even that question now agitateth all Israel; and to my mind worketh in them impotently, as leaven doth in bread set over long, for their disputation bringeth nothing good in outcome," returned Rachel. "But to continue with my narration: Since that wonderful and unaccountable manifestation on the banks of the Jordan the carpenter of Nazareth hath gone about doing good with great power; by the attestation of mine own eyes miracles even being wrought to the glory of God and the blessing of the people; and I do truly believe him to be that One whose coming all the holy prophets did foretell."

“Dost thy brother also believe in him?” was now inquired in tones of tense interest.

“His heart doth much incline so to do, for in childhood’s days he knew and loved the son of Mary, and the latter hath but become greater in all virtue since. Howbeit, the head dictateth that Messiah would not spring from lowly parentage without honor and acclamation, nor come from Nazareth of Galilee; therefore he is undecided in the matter, and much perplexed.”

“In truth, Isaiah saith that out of Bethlehem of Judæa shalt come the Governor to rule the chosen of the Lord,” the Tarsean now spoke.

The importance of what she was about to disclose at this point caused the other to cease for an instant the manipulation of a palmleaf fan, for she was taking her turn at ministering to Sibmah’s need.

“O sister, at a very recent date it hath been revealed to Rehoboam that with the rabbin dwelleth knowledge that some thirty years ago three strangers from the East did worship a babe newly born in David’s town, proclaiming the child to be born King of the Jews; and though near all Judæa knoweth of the horrible massacre of infants through Herod’s command at that time, yet it is noised among a few of the priests and doctors of

the law that a man, a woman, and a young child did escape to Egypt ere the slaughter was performed. And this rumor was the incentive to my brother's journey to the land of the ancient Pharaohs; for our father and some others desire to obtain corroboration of the hearsay, if such there be."

At the conclusion of this recital Rachel saw that a mood of abstraction had drawn upon her hearer, and that an expression of deep sadness dwelt upon the latter's face.

"Some portion of my recounting hath brought thoughts of sorrow upon her; mayhap even of that matter which is to be shared with me in due time," intuition spoke. And as the convalescent was now asleep and needed no present attention, the daughter of Rabbi Elim prepared for a season of repose also, for it was the seventh hour and the heat of the day brooded heavy over the desert.

Before many moments had passed, however, the soft voice of her companion came with earnest question:

"Thou saidst the Nazarene hath in truth performed miracles before thine eyes, and is great in wisdom, my good friend?"

"Yea, even so, sister."

"Then I will seek him," the other whispered.

“For mayhap he can impart that which would transform the life of mine uncle from a season of prolonged sorrow to a time of great rejoicing, and bring to me also a blessing indeed.”

“Thou wilt do well to seek him if comfort and good counsel be desired,” was returned, earnestly.

And then a flash of remembrance came to the last speaker.

“The inward voice truly did show unto me what matter was upon her soul with trouble,” she mused. “May my confidence soon be favored through a sharing of it, for I love her.”

It was this last and mighty thought which remained with Rachel as she sank into a peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER XII ✓

"Seek, and ye shall find."—*Matthew 7. 7.*

IT was during the forepart of the following day that opportunity came for a little season of private intercourse between Rachel and the Tarsean; and truth to say, each had looked forward to it with equal anticipation. Sibmah was so far recovered that she might be left awhile under the watchful care of Philemon, while Neriah guided the pack camels, and so the two damsels allowed their steeds to draw a little behind the others, and rode close, side by side, that converse might pass between them lowly and without effort.

"Thou shalt now hear of that which layeth continually a burden upon my spirit, sister," the fair-haired Jewess said as soon as the position of seclusion was gained; and without audible word the other settled to listening posture, a look of deep interest and sympathy upon her face.

Throwing back the folds of her shielding head-dress with a gesture infinitely expressive of confidence, the former began:

"Thou must know that I was adopted by

Benoni, of Tarsus, my uncle, when a mere infant, his wife then being childless and much grieved in heart thereby. Two years after, however, the twain were remembered by Jehovah, and a woman child was born unto them; such an one as might have gladdened the heart of Sarah of old. The blood of David courseth through the veins of my progenitors, and this babe was favored with eyes and hair like unto the singing king; in truth, it hath been said in the days of our childhood that Mary, my cousin, and I were much alike in outward aspect, although from the beginning she was called Magdalene—the magnificent;” and at this point the beautiful head of the speaker drooped in sincere self-abasement.

“And now cometh the sad portion of the story, O Rachel of Jerusalem. The wife of my uncle’s youth was taken by the Lord not many years after the giving of the child; and even when this sorrow had become a little less to him through the joy of seeing his Magdalene grow day by day more beautiful, then was he bereft of his cherished daughter. And the sharer of all my childhood’s joys and griefs, the one greatly beloved, was with me no more.” Tears many and hot now glistened upon the narrator’s face unhidden.

With eyes deeply compassionate Rachel leaned

from her houdah and placed a hand tenderly upon the shoulder of the weeping one. "Thy sorrow and that of thine uncle pierceth my heart also, sister," she whispered. "But speak, how may the Nazarene help in this case save by words to strengthen thy spirit? for the departed have been gathered to their fathers."

"Truly hath the good helpmeet been gathered to her fathers," was answered, lowly; and then came in tones barely audible to the tense listener: "But she that was called Magdalene, the magnificent, may not be dead; and there lieth the greatest woe. Think deeply upon my next words, sister, and try to understand the meaning therein concealed: so surely as the fair one was beguiled from her father's house in the budding of a pure womanhood, thus surely it were better that she be dead than living in that other life. And as in me is left no further expectation of finding trace of her with mine own strength and wisdom, for long hath been the search and vain, there now seemeth unto my soul but one hope in the matter—even that this Jesus of Nazareth be truly Messiah, and by a miracle guideth the wandering one back to those that love her; or else that he have power to reveal unto them that she be surely dead."

For an instant the deeply touched listener could

find no words to utter, and wrapped in silence the cavalcade sped on its way. Then an impulse seized her, and rising to standing posture in the traveling compartment she leaned far out and kissed the red lips of the Tarsean squarely.

“Forget not that the God of Jacob is compassionate and of tender mercies, O fair one,” she breathed; to finish with eager hopefulness: “And thou wilt do well to seek the Nazarene; for with true wisdom, and compassion, and equity, thou wilt find none other as great as he.”

“Thank thee, sister.” The other smiled. “I will surely seek the face of this Jesus.”

CHAPTER XIII

"I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever."—*Psalms 50. 8.*

ABOUT five miles northeastward from Nazareth, and distant perhaps twelve from the village of Tiberias, the town of Cana is set among the beautiful hills of Galilee, and like unto all the architectural handiwork of the Hebrew people of that era the dwellings therein were straight-lined and uncomely, wrought with great blocks of unsmoothed stone, with intention all for defensive strength and none for beauty. However, the interiors of the mansions of the rich lacked not luxurious appointment, for many of the owners thereof were veritable princes in wealth, and the natural inclinations of the children of Israel ever leaned toward that which was pleasant to the senses.

In a chamber of one of the palaces, at the close of a certain day, the daughter of Rabbi Elim, reclining upon a couch of cushions, vainly endeavored to compose her distraught mentality, while her faithful bondwoman taxed powers of

soothing to the utmost in behalf of the young mistress.

“It is useless, Philemon! my spirit is sorely troubled and will not give me rest,” spoke the damsel at last. “Do thou light the lamps of the candelabrum yonder and then bring refreshments here, for I would sup alone.”

The one thus addressed arose from her crouching posture by the speaker and, after kindling fire to the seven brazen lamps pendant from the candlestick, was about to depart in the fulfillment of the last part of the injunction when came a restraining voice.

“Stay a moment, loyal one, and give a word of counsel; for thy love for me is tried and true and the good brother is far beyond the reaching of quick message.”

The old Hebrew woman knelt before her mistress, the wrinkled face working with emotion.

“Speak plainly, even as a mother might, my Philemon,” Rachel now entreated, earnestly. “What thinkest thou of thy mistress being given unto Abimelech to wife? Thou knowest—as doth he himself—that mine heart is not won, yet father is strong against my wish to remain single; and all others here also—save mine uncle and Raphael; especially the latter, who seemeth as sorely vexed

with the present aspect of the whole matter as myself."

"O Sarai ['My lady'], hast thou in truth made thine heart bare unto thy father?" the kneeling one inquired, lowly, before a response could be given subjoining, "He is both wise and good and hath great love for the only daughter."

"Yea, verily, have I," sorrowfully came the answer. "But the high family standing and wealth of my suitor seem to have blinded his vision in the matter of other things, and now that Rehoboam is in distant parts for an unknown length of season, he desireth me to have an husband ever near to comfort."

For a moment silence now reigned, the aged servant huddled in a heap, so tensely was her soul wrapped in the other's need. Then she spoke with exceeding slowness, for each word was weighed.

"My mistress, thy life is precious in the sight of many, and would it not be stifled with darkness if thou wast joined to that one whose ways we know are evil?"

At this point the body of the speaker swayed back and forth with intensity of feeling.

"O thou that wast cradled in mine own arms during the watches of many a long night, I beseech thee, plead for time that this wrong may be

hindered a season. And mayhap through Jehovah's mercy thou wilt be spared, even as Isaac was spared at the very altar of sacrifice."

Gently Rachel drew the old woman to her and stroked her throbbing temples, even as a daughter might; now the comforter, instead of the one to whom such was being given. "Thou hast spoken with great wisdom, good Philemon," she whispered. "But one thing remaineth for me to do, even that which thy speech proclaimed—to hold off the evil as long as the power lieth in me, and trust in the mercy of the Lord. Let us rise up, therefore, and be as strong as weak women may, for very soon Abimelech will appear with tidings of what did transpire between himself and father at Jerusalem; even concerning my espousal to him; and I must needs be calm then."

So the good servant hurried away to prepare refreshment, but upon her heart was still a weight heavy indeed, and although Rachel's mien was greatly brightened, her spirit did exceedingly fear and quake when was present in mind the smallest thought of the coming of her cousin.

CHAPTER XIV

"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?"—*2 Corinthians 6. 14.*

ATER in the evening the giant son of Rabbi Mahalaleel strode with triumphant step to the summer houses and other places of seclusion upon the roof of his father's house, confident of finding the object of his matrimonial desires awaiting in some such environment conducive to wooing; but the search was in vain. He then descended to the private court of the mansion, and with linen robes and mantle swishing with the impatience of his stride, followed an inlaid walk leading about cooling fountains and under richly carved stone archways, much to his disgust at last to find her ensconced upon a bench directly beneath a brilliantly illuminated candlestick, and accompanied by the aged Philemon.

His greeting was with much apparent joviality, however.

"Peace and joy be unto thee, cousin," he cried; the while casting a meaningful look at the bond-woman.

But Rachel had previously given express com-

mand that the latter should remain at her side during the expected interview, and now, with self-contained demeanor, motioned the man to a seat upon a stool that stood by, saying, simply, "Peace be unto thee, cousin."

The amorous ardor of Abimelech was hard to daunt, however, and seeing that the obnoxious third person was not to be banished, from thenceforth he wholly ignored her presence.

"If the betrothed of our father Jacob were before me alive, her namesake's deportment would surely be chided." He laughed; drawing the stool nearer the damsel, adding, unabashedly, "For well is it known that she gave her suitor warmer greeting than thou hast now done, O Rachel." And again a strident guffaw echoed beneath the archways.

"Father Jacob did not sue for a woman that loved him not," was returned, lowly.

"What hath love to do in the case?" now came in tones which only partly veiled a sneer. "Was woman not fashioned simply to be a helpmate? and have I not the wherewithal to recompense thee for aught given in such capacity?"

"Thou hast money and lands, and art a Saducee growing in favor among thy sect; these things my heart crieth not for," and the speaker turned from the other with wearied motion.

“And have I not all else to give a woman might ask or require?” the man returned, with vast effort to be tender. “In truth, I desire no other to wife but thee, Rachel,” and a strong arm reached to embrace the one thus wooed.

But the attention was evaded. “Thou hast not desire for other woman to wife perhaps.” The words were uttered slowly and distinctly, and were well understood by the hearer of them.

The one thus rebuked fidgeted a bit. “Who hath been speaking ill of the elder son of Rabbi Mahalaleel?” he whined.

“Thine own actions are the only accusers, cousin,” and the dark eyes of the last speaker now focused squarely upon the other’s evading ones.

A long instant was Abimelech confused before this scrutiny, and then his whole demeanor suddenly transformed; a veritable demon seeming to rise within him as he spoke with voice both stern and harsh.

“Thy father hath given thee unto me, O righteous one; and it were better for thee to meekly accept thy portion at the beginning, if all is to be well thereafter.” And now a masterful arm that would not be denied reached forth.

For a time which seemed as an eternity of darkness Rachel suffered the embrace; knowing not

how to escape from it; feeling as though Jehovah had hid from her his face; and then came sound of footsteps approaching along a winding way of the court.

Smothering an oath, the man released the unhappy one, and had barely time to remove himself to decorous distance when appeared a young woman of majestic mold, crowned with thick coils of hair which shone as burnished copper in the light of the pendant lamps. Her bondwoman Sibmah, now in perfect health, followed also.

“Hail, Sarah of Tarsus! my friend!” Rachel cried, rising with celerity to embrace the newcomer. “Since we parted at Jerusalem so long a season past, my soul hath greatly yearned for thee, and thou art now welcome indeed.”

“And thou wilt forgive that which appeareth so great intrusion? for thine uncle himself directed me hither to find thee,” smiled the guest, noting the heightened color in the two young faces, and the marks of recent perturbation upon the wrinkled one, without seeming to do so.

“My salutation was sincere, O sister, for even now thou art welcome indeed,” the other responded with head slightly drooping; thence changing the subject by introducing her cousin.

For once the latter was not at ease in the pres-

ence of ladies. After making a few mumbled responses he excused himself and departed elsewhere; and his going brought an immeasurable sense of relief to one that was left.

As the Tarsean took the seat now offered her upon the bench, the light from above revealed upon her face an expression of joy almost uncontrollable, and with intense eagerness she turned to speak.

“Know, my sister, that a thing of moment indeed did bring me unto Cana, to visit a stranger’s house unheralded and unexpected; and when the matter is revealed, thou mayest explain full detail to thy relatives, for all is now unto the glory of the Lord.”

The one addressed immediately became infused with the other’s spirit of ardor. “Thou fair one, the cause of thy presence in this house needeth not explanation to any; but as thou lovest me, tell the good tidings quickly,” she expectantly breathed.

Encircling an arm about the shoulders of the smaller maiden, the fair-haired Jewess complied with this request.

“After parting with thee at Jerusalem, O daughter of the rabbi, I sought long to find the son of Mary of Nazareth, through all Judæa, then

the parts of Galilee; praying for help and guidance to Jehovah constantly; but ever the journeyings of the Nazarene eluded mine, as though a power had decreed that I should not see his face. Be that as it may, at last mine heart failed in the matter, and the way was taken to Tarsus to the house desolated and forlorn.

“Whilst there abiding, the companion of my childhood, even Saul, who did sit at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel, spake unto me great, swelling words against Jesus of Nazareth, claiming that by the teaching of the Prophets and the Law the latter was proven false and a menace to Israel. And I was persuaded, sister; persuaded against the son of Mary and all his works, openly endeavoring to turn others to such way of thinking also,” and at this point the lustrous eyes of the speaker for an instant quite lost the erstwhile glint of joyfulness.

“But, Rachel, the Lord is good! Truly had been heard my supplications to be led to this Jesus, for although mine eyes have not yet seen his face, I now would gladly wipe his feet with mine hair,” and through the depth of feeling the Tarsean’s palms were pressed tight upon her face.

“What hath transpired? O reveal it, I beseech thee,” the listener implored.

Lowly, and shaking with emotion, the response was given:

“The once lost and longed-for cousin; the one called Magdalene, the magnificent, even she hath returned to transform the house of desolation to a home of happiness unspeakable. And in her breast beateth a heart newly created, pure as a lily of the field; and as Jehovah is the God of Israel I believe that one who performed the miracle to be his Son.”

For many moments the dark-crowned head and the light were strained close, tears of gladness being together mingled in spirit of true sisterhood. The two gray-haired servants also rejoiced from the depths of their souls, rocking to and fro with fervor, even as Philemon had done from excess of grief a few hours past.

And now, perhaps through recollections brought by sight of the latter demonstration, thoughts of impending evil began to return to Rachel’s consciousness, intensified in power to trouble by the recent ecstasy of joy. She did not mar the other’s happiness by any word upon the matter, however, resolutely setting herself aside.

But when the hour to retire had passed, the daughter of Rabbi Elim tossed long upon her bed, the elusive fancies now picturing the glorious won-

der of the newly-fashioned Magdalene; thence conjuring forebodings of what a life yoked with Abimelech might hold.

When forgetfulness came to her at last, that which ushered consciousness away was the inwardly spoken resolution: "Even as I once counseled Sarah of Tarsus to seek the Nazarene in her trouble, thus will I do on the morrow."

CHAPTER XV /

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—*John 1. 29.*

EARLY on the morning following, Rachel arose and made preparations for the short journey to Nazareth, as it had recently been reported to Cana that the son of Mary was then tarrying for a short season at his mother's house. She told no one of her intentions save Philemon, who was to go also; even Sarah of Tarsus was allowed to depart homeward unenlightened, for the latter's happiness was now so great the one with sorrow would not mar it.

At an opportune moment the two women slipped unobserved from a side wicket of the mansion, and mounting a pair of donkeys which had been surreptitiously made ready, set out across the hills for the little town which vies with Bethlehem of Judæa for being in all the world the most highly favored.

Strange as it may seem, the astounding extent of the spirit of antagonism which now prevailed against Jesus of Nazareth in the parts surrounding the place of his erstwhile abiding was wholly

unknown by mistress or maid; for although dwelling even in the midst of it the former had rarely gone forth abroad from her uncle's home, and the hated attentions of Abimelech had caused her to withdraw from intercourse with her relatives as much as possible under the circumstances. And so the revelations which came on the present occasion were as thunder from a clear sky.

A company of bare-shanked, bronze-visaged Galileans were met, and desiring information, Rachel timidly accosted the foremost of them. "May the Lord be with you, sir," she greeted. And as the response was respectfully given she gained courage to inquire, "Knowest thou whether Jesus of Nazareth is now abiding with his mother and brethren?"

The man hesitated an instant, an expression of antagonism hardening the rugged lines of his face. Finally he muttered, "In the first hour of the day we saw the carpenter leading some of his disciples toward the house of Mary of Nazareth, good my mistress; but as he doth openly repudiate his mother and brethren, we may not say that he now abideth with them."

"I will not believe such thing against him," involuntarily broke from the seeker of information.

With shoulders updrawn and hands outspread

in manner highly expressive the spokesman turned to his companions for corroboration.

“All that will follow him, aye, even be they the rabble of the street, are greater in his eyes than the nearest of kin, according to the law,” another affirmed.

A light of comprehension now came to Rachel.

“Sir, it may be thou hast not rightly interpreted that which he hath spoken,” she earnestly said. “Never was more dutiful son, never more loving brother; and I speak that which I do know. Howbeit, if it hath been proclaimed that they who believe in and appreciate one to the greatest extent come nearer than mother or brother or sister, canst thou deny the truth of it?”

The man heading the group shifted uneasily from one foot to the other an instant. “Thou speakest in riddles, my mistress,” he at last fended, lamely, to add with growing confidence: “But this I say, if thou thinkest to see a miracle performed, thou wilt be disappointed, for in Nazareth he doeth them not.”

“Aye, in his own country he cannot do them,” rasped several. And with scowls and mutterings the men passed on.

A great astonishment having been aroused in Rachel, others met along the way were questioned

concerning their state of feeling regarding the wonderful man sprung from their midst; and many whom the great carpenter had served faithfully and well during the years spent at his trade—beside being unto them a friend indeed—now only shook their heads and murmured: “He doeth nothing great in his own country! We follow him not.”

At last the interrogations were no longer put; mistress and maid riding for a season in silence, seeing not the full-blooming beauty of the orchards or the wealth of promise in the vineyards, for their spirits were greatly burdened and their minds grappling with problems complex and deep. Once the former spoke, but it was more the voicing of revery than aught else.

“How may the government be upon the shoulders of this man when his own doth cast him out?” was the sadly given exclamation.

And Philemon did not attempt to make answer.

Nazareth lies little over five miles from Cana, southwestward, and it was not long before the gray walls of its buildings showed to the eyes of the two traveling thither, for the town was set upon a ridge. The vicinity was familiar to them, and so, without needing to halt for direction, the way was wended straight to the home of Mary, mother of Jesus.

The dwelling in question differed not at all in outward appearance from the humble abodes of artisans it neighbored. Hard of outline, two-storied, with window openings only in the upper chamber, without doubt should the lower rooms be entered, the flooring thereof would be found simply to consist of bare earth trodden hard, and dry as desert sands. Truly a strange seeming castle this to shelter the King of kings!

But no such idea was with the seeking ones; to them the environment was quite proper for that lowly man heretofore known as the carpenter of Nazareth.

As the two neared the house thus described they saw a little company of men gathered by its portal, seeming in attitude of waiting. These latter were for the most part fishermen, weather-beaten in aspect and clothed with garments suitable for such calling; but one of them was gowned in robes richly fringed and bordered, evidently a scribe; and desiring information, the daughter of the rabbi now turned naturally to this man.

"Peace be unto you, sir," she said. "We seek Jesus of Nazareth. Is he now with his mother at home?"

An expression of great kindness transformed the man's meager features as his deep sunken,

piercing eyes rested an instant upon the questioner. Then he spoke with surprisingly gentle tones: "O mistress, rightly it might not be said that he were home, though in yonder house; for his own word hath proclaimed that 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head'; howbeit he hath been parted from us a little season, therefore are we now gathered here waiting the return. But Mary of Nazareth is absent from these parts at this time."

The two women now dismounted, thence leading the donkeys toward a strip of grass by the roadside to graze, and while thus engaged a Certain One approached from a diverse direction!—so unobtrusively that they knew not of it until he stood revealed directly before them.

An instant they stood gazing full upon the wonderful face; saw the marring of sorrow incarnate, the perfect beauty of virtue, the mighty strength of spirit begot through weakness of the flesh, and then they knelt low, their lips pressing even the hem of his garment.

But a gentle hand reached forth and lifted them up, mistress and bondmaid together, and a smile so filled with love and compassion that it was divine beamed upon them, shining into their very souls

with a radiance which drove back abashed all other sense save that of its own presence.

And then the Certain One departed, followed by the little company of favored men, and Rachel yet remained mute upon the wayside, the object of her journey unrevealed by her lips.

Consciousness of self came creeping back at last to the daughter of Rabbi Elim, and she turned as though to follow after the Nazarene, but quickly halted.

“O Philemon,” she whispered, “by spoken word I will not add my sorrow to the load already upon that burdened One, although truly his glance did seem to proclaim unto my soul that it was already upon his shoulders. Come, let us return. Yea, even unto Abimelech if so be it is Jehovah’s will; for my spirit now seemeth strengthened to bear aught that is in store; strengthened even by the vision of that Man of Sorrow.”

And without counter word the aged bondwoman retraced the way to Cana; for the vision was with her also.

CHAPTER XVI ^c

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."—*Proverbs 27. 6.*

THE feast designed to celebrate the marriage of the elder son of Rabbi Mahalaleel with the daughter of Rabbi Elim was to be given by the latter at his mansion in Jerusalem during the first month of the year, which is March, according to the calculation of the Jews; and each day which brought the festivity nearer was as a step toward a deep and dark abyss to the one thus espoused against her will.

Sarah of Tarsus now knew all concerning the matter, and came often to Cana to see her friend during this period, her heart greatly grieved for the other's sake. On one occasion the two had withdrawn from the heat of noon tide to a spacious summer house upon the roof, and it was the Tar-sean's voice only which there sounded with audible lamentation.

"For my sake and Sibmah's this sorrow hath come upon thee, sister," she spoke, sadly. "Had thy heart not been moved with compassion for us in the desert, thou wouldest even now be in Egypt with thy brother."

"So be it! the act of love is not repented," was the calm response. "And surely I have been repaid an hundredfold with thy heart's devotion. The gratitude of Sibmah also is mine, and she declarereth to have been led to believe in the Nazarene through that small act of sacrifice, for his influence it was which guided me, thou wilt recall."

"Through him hath joy come unto me and sorrow to thee; and thou art the more worthy. I comprehend it not," lowly returned the other.

"In days of old did not Jehovah often permit affliction to come upon his people to prepare their hearts for the receiving of some great mercy, my sister? And though I be but the least of his handmaids, mayhap such is my case; for at seasons when the burden seemeth more than I can bear an inward voice thus intimateth unto me. And was not darkness also abiding with thee and thine uncle before the morning broke and the sunshine entered in?"

The Tarséan now drew the brave one close; the gentle movement and the expression upon her face amply giving affirmation to the latter's queries. After a season of quiet meditation she asked:

"Canst thou not dispatch such word unto thy brother that he will immediately return to Jerusalem?"

“I know not whither to send,” Rachel faltered. “The epistle last received proceeding from him, proclaimed his intention of journeying to many places, some far removed from Alexandria, where our father’s friend abideth.”

“From the square fashion of thy brother’s countenance I would judge him to be one not easily turned from the gaining of aught which once had engaged his seeking; therefore, he may yet tarry hence many months; aye, even a year or more.” The other now spoke pensively.

“Thy judgment is correct, as no doubt thy deducement will prove,” regretfully was returned. Then a mischievous light appeared in the speaker’s dark eyes, as she added with a smile, “Thou wert observed somewhat closely also during that short season of opportunity in the desert; for the very first message to reach me from Rehoboam contained no little discourse on thy graces, O fair one.”

“A willful tease thou art,” reproved the Tarcean; the soft bloom of her cheeks deepening in spite of all efforts to remain composed. Then finishing in all seriousness, “Howbeit, for thy sake I shall beseech the Lord to guide hither quickly the one in Egypt; for thou hast said the latter holdeth no liking for Abimelech, and there seemeth none other to move thy father in the matter.”

"To mine own knowledge there is no one else," the other murmured; after an instant to explain more fully, "Rabbi Mahalaleel, my uncle, is a good man and hath never urged the suit of his son, seeing that I was against it. He knoweth not the depth of my feeling in the matter, however, and I will not tell him."

A season of silence now ensued, during which each of the two friends were engrossed with cogitation. Finally Rachel gave utterance to a thought which had come in connection with her last spoken words.

"There is one other strongly against my being given unto Abimelech: even the younger and cherished cousin. And he hath ever been greatly loved by my father, and might influence him to great extent. But of late the deportment of Raphael seemeth very strange; he mopeth by himself continually, talking with no one; shunning me even more markedly than others—I that have been special confidante and friend hitherto." A decided note of perplexity was in the speaker's tones as she concluded.

The Tarsean now cast a swift and searching glance at the comely one resting against her, then abstractedly traced carvings in the roof's parapet with her finger. At last she said, abruptly, "O,

Rachel, thou art greatly loved by thy younger cousin."

Without sign of embarrassment the subject of this declaration drew to more upright posture, and after rearranging the loosened coils of lustrous hair, responded in measured tones to the other's assertion: "The affection of Raphael is truly from the heart; we have been as brother and sister always."

Again the shapely hand following the masonry of the summer house denoted a state of mental absorption; and then came tones low and earnest: "My sister, as the Lord liveth I believe that passion now held for thee by Raphael is not a brother's, but a greater."

At this implication the one addressed hid her face indeed, the hot blood pulsing even to her finger tips. "Thou art surely mistaken," she whispered. "The God of mercy would not permit such thing to happen. If thy conviction were truly so, the gloom which impendeth my soul would be as naught compared with that encompassing his; for hope of deliverance and a future joy to come hath lightened my spirit, but what hope of marital happiness is there for one stricken as he, though Abimelech's suit should come to naught?"

"Love resteth not on hope, but oft engendereth

it when reason cannot; and mayhap a glow of glad expectation burneth in the spirit of Raphael, kept alive by a trust in the goodness of Jehovah, even as thine is," was returned gently.

"My supplications shall constantly rise to heaven that thou mayest be proven wholly wrong," Rachel murmured, her face still covered by her hands.

Sarah of Tarsus now passed her arm about her friend again, and her touch was as a mother's:

"I would put a certain question unto thee, sister; wilt thou forgive what seemeth bold? for in truth, love for thee is the incentive."

"Speak, fair one! Never couldst thou seem bold, nor bring offense unto me."

Despite the surety of this permission the Tar- sean yet hesitated an instant, and then with much earnestness the query came:

"If the great affliction were not, O daughter of Jerusalem, couldst thou love thy younger cousin even as a woman should love her husband?"

A moment of tense stillness now ensued, the mentality of the one addressed seeming to herself as a whirling chaos of conflicting emotions. An abashed self-consciousness was there, and perplexity; and then a greatly combated and astonished sense of affirmation concerning the question

which had caused the disturbance gradually took shape and loomed back of it all as a mighty intruder that might never be displaced.

At last the response came, almost as a moan: "O sister, if I am indeed beloved of thee, why puttest thou that question? In the beginning Eve our mother was satisfied to keep the Lord's commandment till her mind was caused to center upon the fruit forbidden; and even as the first woman received injunction to abstain from the fruit of the tree of good and evil knowledge, so is a daughter of Abraham denied right to be given in wedlock to one maimed in body."

At these words the other knelt before the distraught speaker, expression of earnest pleading showing in the blue depth of her eyes. "O thou that hast been unto me more than friend," she whispered, "the question seeming so needless and cruel was not idly put, and from the conviction imparted by thy last speech so woeful, hath taken root a resolve which may yet bear fruit to thine endless joy."

"Thy tongue speaketh a riddle, O fair one, but from thine eyes shineth a love that maketh me forget all else, therefore I will try to await the fulfillment of thy words with patience."

Rachel now could smile.

CHAPTER XVII

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”—*Matthew 27. 46.*

TRUE to the following of that good counsel given by Philemon, the daughter of Rabbi Elim besought postponement of her date of wedding to a more distant season; but the stern-visaged man whose word ruled the matter was fully convinced that all had been planned for the good of his child, and would not give in to her.

“Thine own way was allowed thee one other time, and when all was finished, the outcome showed as I would have had it at the beginning,” he said with decisive tones on one occasion, and could not be made to see that his former yielding had been an instrument in the bestowing of much benefit to Sarah of Tarsus.

Vain also seemed the maiden’s oft-repeated supplication to the God of her fathers, that he would stretch forth a hand mighty to intervene; and at last Rachel removed from Cana to her father’s house, for the beginning of months was even at the door, bringing in its train a host of relatives eager for the anticipated festivity.

And now took possession of the bride desires strange seeming indeed for one espoused, and in such state generally conceded to be highly favored. The least of them was her wish to remain in seclusion for several days preceding the festive season, to be visited only by a few cherished and chosen; and the most difficult to be understood with tolerance was the request that the prospective banquet should be given in an apartment which she had hitherto shunned with intense insistence, even the death chamber of her mother.

Rabbi Elim had striven to dissuade his daughter from the latter idea; but was effectually silenced when with voice trembling, and tears upon her face she said to him, "Thy will is done in that I am to be given unto Abimelech, O my father; grant that thing which is now asked of thee, for it is the last favor thou mayest give ere I belong to another man."

The nuptial day dawned over Jerusalem with unclouded sky, and the first person to be astir in the festive mansion was Rachel herself. Poets unnumbered have run the gamut of imagination in the portrayal of the sublime bliss of such an hour, and well it is that the somber aspect of the theme has been left untouched by inspired pens to so great extent. Howbeit, the most ardent and ro-

mance-loving genius would have been quite unable to cast a gloss of joy over this break of morning in its relation to the one espoused. On her knees before a window which opened toward the temple the season was spent, and the trouble of soul revealed in the low murmured supplications surely was understood by that One whose great heart of love is always open to receive such outpouring.

But in a little while from roof to most distant court of the house the inmates were awake, and the sound of talking and moving about thence arising gradually increased as time progressed, finally reaching such volume in the servants' quarters that many of the guests began to conjecture upon the matter; some even straining ear by slightly opened chamber door in an endeavor to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

Finally the bride became aware of the unwonted rumpus also, thereupon sounding a summons for her bondmaid.

At the latter's appearance she wonderingly inquired: "What can the matter be, Philemon? A second confusion of tongues would seem to have been visited upon this house, from the babel which proceedeth from below."

For a moment the aged servant remained silent, unwilling to answer the question; and seeing that

something out of the ordinary had occurred. Rachel arose from a stool whereon she had been resting by a window and went to the hesitating one, placing an encouraging arm around the bent shoulders.

“Fear not to speak, O thou faithful one; for my spirit hath been strengthened by prayer and is able to bear aught thou mayest impart.”

Seeing that it was no longer possible to evade, the other now reluctantly spoke. “For two days thy younger cousin Raphael hath been absent from this house, O Sarai! and it hath been ascertained that he is not at his home in Cana, and there seemeth none with certain knowledge concerning him. But thy friend from Tarsus doth this morning earnestly adjure thy father to hold the wedding for his return if need be till the morrow, seeming confident that naught hath transpired to his hurt. And the loud speaking which now proceedeth from the court below is the protest of Sinai and thine espoused husband against idea of such tarrying.”

During the explanation the listener’s dark eyes opened wide with astonished dismay. “Raphael missing for two days! why hast thou not revealed the matter unto me before, Philemon?” she exclaimed a little sternly.

The one thus addressed bowed her head before the note of rebuke, thence answering humbly: "Good, O my mistress, forget not that a long season of solitude and sorrow hath been with thee; was it meet that I should bring added burden to one already so greatly weighted?"

"Thou that hath been unto me as a second mother, forgive!" now was cried, remorsefully. "See, I wipe the tears from thine eyes with mine own handkerchief. Now go and fetch some milk and wheat cakes, O faithful one, for this day will claim all the power to endure which is the inheritance of the daughter of Rabbi Elim the Strong. Also do thou make request of Sarah of Tarsus that she come unto my chamber just so quickly as she may."

When the bondwoman had departed on the missions Rachel again went to the stool by the window, the wonted smoothness of her brow marred by lines of perturbation.

"Surely, that one with eyes so blue and open hath great power to conceal," she mused. "Although with me near all of yesterday, not a word concerning Raphael was spoken, and naught seemed upon her mind save the matter of that darkness which doth threaten me. Howbeit she will make all clear when we meet face to face."

The explanation came not so soon, however. Upon entering the chamber of her friend, the Tar-sean drew the latter to the low set couch, her eyes shining with hopeful expectancy.

“O sister! that season whence thou wouldest be best made to understand my strange seeming conduct hath not yet come; therefore, have patience a little while, I pray thee,” she entreated; to continue with tones filled with conviction: “And as in her soul is hope of paradise, thy friend believeth the forbearance will have reward. But this she can say with knowledge concerning the welfare of the cherished cousin: he is not lost, and will make every effort to return in season to be present at the wedding feast. And through such certainty being laid before thy father, his promise is given me that the banquet shall be held till eventide at least, if necessary, for the coming of the absent one.”

An expression of infinite trust now smoothed the lines of trouble from Rachel’s countenance. “Thou art a ray of light unto my soul, fair one!” she smiled, then added, almost in a whisper: “Mayhap the God of mercy hath sent this hindrance to the wedding in answer to the supplications of his handmaid! But what foolishness doth my tongue proclaim? For is not Abimelech awaiting me when

all is done?" and the speaker's head drooped low as full remembrance of existing conditions returned to her.

The Tarsean made no verbal reply to the last speech of renewed sorrow; she simply passed her hand with soothing touch across the other's forehead many times. And in her eyes still showed strongly a hope of good to come.

Slowly the day wore on, but Raphael did not return. Earnest and vociferous were the petitions taken to Rabbi Elim by the prospective bridegroom and his fond mother and sister; for the fact that the wedding was being delayed for the sake of one who had always been in their eyes a useless and undesired encumbrance seemed too monstrous a thing to be comprehended; but the governor of the approaching festivity remained true to the promise given to Sarah of Tarsus.

The eighth and then the ninth hour came and went with still no tidings from the missing one; and now was Rachel's spirit in darkness indeed.

"Do thou remain close at my side until even the moment when that other doth claim me for his own, O sister," she almost mechanically spoke to her cherished friend at last; and after making earnest promise the latter put the finishing touches to the bridal raiment and then the two left the

chamber where they had been in seclusion almost the entire day, making way toward that room which had so short a time ago harbored death of the flesh, and now bade fair to be a gate through which a spirit should pass to a shadow deeper than the grave.

During the passage thither, while they were yet alone, the tall Jewess drew very near the smaller maiden, whispering lowly, "Sister, forget not that the mercy of Jehovah is everlasting; and he hath ever harkened to the faithful ones that call upon his name in their affliction."

But in the breast where hope had hitherto burned unquenchably a mighty darkness now was, and from the depth of it Rachel spoke.

"The God of my fathers hath hid from me his face," she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."—
John 6. 37.

THE apartment selected by melancholy fancy for the nuptial feasting was far better suited to the last event of sad moment which had occurred therein. It was an immense chamber of somber and heavy appointment situated near the center of the house and next the roof, and the only natural illumination finding way to its recesses was admitted from directly above through a stained and intricately designed skylight, the western arch of which had been fashioned in sockets to raise or lower as demand for fresh outer air might require. When unclouded blue vaulted the city of David, during a brief season just preceding eventide, sunbeams found slanting way through this opening to transform all in their radius to a pathway of gold, but at other times the place at best was ill lit. For the occasion in question an immense table had been fashioned down the length of the chamber, and in variety and richness the garnishings thereon were such that even the wealthy Rabbi Elim had no cause for troubling

his mind over what an enemy might say concerning the hospitality. All places at the board were now filled save three to the left of where the bridegroom sat expectantly waiting; and, indeed, anxious eagerness was plainly shown in one way or another by each person present, for the patience of all had been tried to the utmost.

But such moments must finally come to climax, and at last the glances of the assemblage focused upon the main portal, for the approach of two persons could be faintly heard.

At a signal from Rabbi Elim the company arose, and the tall figure of the former moved forward toward the door, his robes of snow-white linen deep fringed, hanging in stately folds, one hand outstretched to lead the beloved daughter to Abimelech.

But even at the very point of yielding to the proffered guidance the bride became motionless in her tracks, an inward emotion bringing to her cheeks a flush to rival even a rose of Sharon.

“Almost is it time for the sunshine to enter in, my father!” she whispered, in tones so tense that all in the room heard them. “Wilt thou not allow me to await its coming to be given? And if this be granted, it may be that the absent one will yet return ere the feast doth commence, for the spirit

of this my good friend hath conviction that he is hastening hither even now," and in conclusion the supplicator turned to the Tarsean for corroboration of her last words.

A brief instant the man hesitated, for his patience was nigh to an end, but a certain glint in the blue eyes of the stately damsel referred to gave strong reminder of the promise to hold the proceedings until the day was full spent, if need be; therefore he now reluctantly faced about, saying in tones of forced composure:

"Good friends, as my daughter desireth to be given in marriage even in that season when the sun glorifieth the chamber, let it be done so, for the time is at hand."

Thus saying he returned to the governor's place, giving sign for those standing to be seated, the while a muffled sound of sighing and shifting of position clearly proclaimed the mental attitude of the guests.

And slowly, but surely, the faintly traced shadows moved eastward under the skylight, while Rachel and her maid of honor remained upon the portal's threshold, hand clasped in hand, the former's head entirely unveiled, as became a Jewish bride, but with eyes cast down and lusterless.

Such a moment sears deep into the memory of those it may hold tragedy for, and the mark which it leaves remains to the grave. The temples of the two standing together burned and throbbed from mental agony, but this difference was with them: in the consciousness of the one there was now not a spark of hope of deliverance from the sorrow which confronted her; the other's spirit could scarce contain an anguish of glad expectancy which would not die, though all the powers of evil seemed against it.

A moment more and a glint of gold shot to the carving at the base of a gray column at the far end of the room, and traveling slantingly upward its illumination transformed somberness to glory as it came.

But the daughter of Rabbi Elim did not see the approaching and widening shaft of sunlight; her position commanded view of the entire depth of the mansion, for the floors were built with balconies rising tier above tier, the central court being open to the roof; and with the despairing intensity of interest which a condemned person will sometimes have for an event which is not anticipated to alter their condition whatever, but may bring to them a transient thrill of gladness nevertheless, she watched the main wicket which opened

to the street; for through this gate the missing one would most likely come, if came he at all.

At this instant the clatter of a donkey's hoofs upon the stone pavement outside the house was heard.

"Rejoice, O my sister, for the cherished cousin cometh!" Sarah of Tarsus breathed, an expression of joy ineffable upon her face.

"It cannot be; for thou didst hear the sound as of one dismounting with a leap," was returned, lowly, without sign of interest in the tones.

An insistent summons for admittance now sounded from below, but Rachel did not remain in her position of observation to ascertain the identity of the late comer; she had turned about to find the appointed time of her sacrifice to be even at hand, and with aspect of bowed resignation was moving toward her father, who had risen to meet her.

But she did not reach him; in the interval of the progress thitherward a servant had given admittance to the vehement knocker upon the gate, and with remarkable agility and speed the latter personage had mounted the several stairways leading to the topmost floor—and lo! between father and daughter stood a young man whose graceful lineaments were revealed clear and beautiful by a

wealth of sunbeams which now rested full upon him.

“My son that was lost!” came the glad cry from Rabbi Mahalaleel; and then with trembling voice the old man fervently glorified the God of his fathers.

As the adoration ceased, however, Rabbi Elim raised a gainsaying hand toward the company about the table; for the latter seemed about to throw decorum to the winds, and to satisfy their astonished curiosity, make a general rush for the object which had stirred them.

“Friends, a mistake lieth somewhere in the matter,” he said, compellingly. “This youth surely doth bear the image of the missing and expected one; but see, he is straight and strong as the finest in Israel.” And turning to the late comer the speaker almost sternly inquired:

“Who art thou that intrudest at this inopportune moment with thy marvelous likeness to another?”

The young man thus addressed drew himself even more erect before them all; his garments of unbordered white seeming to glisten in the intensified light from above.

“Once I was maimed and afflicted, an object of forbearance and shame,” his voice sounded with



BUT WITH LIGHTNING QUICKNESS RAPHAEL STEPPED BETWEEN, WITH EXTENDED ARM
AND FINGER POINTING STRAIGHT AT THE GIANT

musical intonation; then with head tossed back in gesture of conscious strength, in tones filled with gratitude: "Nevertheless, through the love and compassion which doth make Jesus of Nazareth mighty in power, I am one created anew in body and in spirit—even Raphael that was, and is."

For a brief instant not a person in the room uttered a sound or moved; and then Abimelech, flushed with passion, burst forth:

"Away with the fellow and his lying story of miracle! Who he may be I care not, but let us to the feast, for the time appointed by the bride herself hath come; therefore, why tarry ye?" and thus declaiming he sprang from his seat and strode toward Rachel, who stood motionless as marble and nearly as white.

But with lightning quickness Raphael stepped between, with extended arm and finger pointing straight at the giant.

"Evil-minded one! thy course is run, for the maiden is mine heart and soul! Yea, and I shall take her to wife even from thy very hand; for thou art not worthy!" rang out clear and sharp as a trumpet note.

And now not a man present but looked to see the bold speaker ignominiously crushed; not a woman but hid her face in terror of what was to come.

Abimelech the cruel made not a further motion to advance, however. Did a divine influence yet linger about the one so wonderfully made whole, to protect him now, or was it but the giving back of an evil spirit before the mightier one of virtue? Be that as it may, the eyes of the bestial man lowered before the light in his brother's face, and even as a whipped cur the huge fellow slunk back.

Now Rabbi Elim found power to speak again. "What meaneth this?" He rapped sharply. "My daughter, if this be thy younger cousin in truth—and surely the fashion of his countenance doth proclaim such to be the case—hast thou a preference for the lad above the elder brother? Make the matter clearly known, for the temper of the company hath been sorely tried, and the feast must progress."

Mechanically, as one awaking from a deep sleep, Rachel passed her hand before her eyes, in the extremity of the moment turning for strengthening direction to Sarah of Tarsus. And the expression of supreme satisfaction and joy upon the latter's face was worth more than words to her.

With a motion expressive of infinite yielding the bride now stepped toward her true lover, the while drawing her mantle closer in a vain endeavor to hide her burning cheeks.

"O, my father, Raphael hath truly spoken," she said, simply.

The governor of the feast now wheeled about to face Rabbi Mahalaleel.

"What hast thou to say concerning this strange matter, brother?" he inquired.

The deep sunken eyes of the one addressed glowed as he arose to answer:

"The Lord of Hosts hath restored unto me my son made whole; even by the hand of his Anointed One. Give the maiden to him who hath been so highly favored."

Thus Rachel was given unto Raphael to wife, and the last gleam of glory to issue through the skylight shed its blessing upon the two, even as a token of divine approbation.

But the bride herself was barely conscious of what now befell her. A greater thing filled her soul almost to bursting with ecstasy—even remembrance of that marvelous smile of understanding and compassion which shone upon the face of the Nazarene as he looked upon her by his mother's house.

"Surely, my sorrow was known by him and borne upon his shoulders," her spirit caroled. "Blessed be his name."

CHAPTER XIX

"My strength is made perfect in weakness."—*2 Corinthians 12. 9.*

ABOUT one hundred and fifty miles south from the Roman city of Alexandria and perhaps a third of that distance from Memphis southwestward, a portion of the Libyan hills rear their summits stark and silent, protecting from the devastating sweep of the desert winds the shining reach of Lake Qerun, a stretch of waters perhaps twenty-five miles in length and five in width at certain points. Wadies innumerable lead from all directions to this oasis, formed by limestone ridges which ever and anon beetle to rugged cliffs where caves and fissures extend abiding place for jackals and other wild roamers of the vicinity.

However, one grotto in particular, which faced directly to the lake and was not more than ten rods from the verdure of its borders, gave grateful shelter to a son of Israel and his bondman at an hour in their journeyings to and fro in the land of the ancient Pharaohs, when the hot hand of

fever had suddenly drawn talons close upon the master; and although the battle now had been fought and won, still was the angel of the shadow valley removed not far from them.

How greatly altered was the countenance of Rehoboam from the lineaments fashioned in vigor and confidence which smiled with benediction to Rachel at the parting in Kadesh Barnea; it was well the latter could not see the change or know of it; but strength of body and courage of spirit were now slowly but surely returning to the stricken man.

As the jagged line of the hills was glorified in the east at the beginning of a much-anticipated day, the latter was able to rise from his couch of straw and mats in the cavern, and, aided by the ever-ready Tobiah, make a faltering way to the open.

“Now truly do I comprehend the great misery which dwelt with the chosen people in the land of affliction and bondage; and the swelling hope which came to them when release was near.” He spoke as friend to friend, for seasons of deep trouble and need are sure levelers of caste. “And thou, O loyal one, hath been unto me all things a good physician, friend, or brother might, even to the staying of the hand of death, I do believe, and the matter shall not be forgotten.”

"Thou couldst have sent message to the Alexandrian alabarch, and a train of camels headed by his own physician would have come at thy behest, O my master," was returned, lowly, an expression of deep pleasure showing upon the seamed and shriveled countenance of the old Arabian nevertheless.

"Aye! a train of camels laden, a physician paid, and naught else," was returned with no little unction from the convalescent, who thence continued with vehemence: "This son of the House of Judah hath learned through the refinement of great trial that riches and high estate guarantee not true friendship, and largess cast free-handed is not always charity. And he desireth not favors from one whose heart is like unto the bosom of the Sphinx. Was not the so-called friend of my father tarrying even in Memphis when thou didst haste to him with message of that evil which had newly come upon me, Tobiah? and yet he came not a step from thence himself, but must needs send instead a dromedary well cushioned to bear me to his palace; by the tomb of Jacob, it were a corpse that would be as grateful to my lordship as the living son of Rabbi Elim!" And exhausted from excess of fervor the speaker sank upon a sloping stretch of heat-baked earth, heaving a sigh

of satisfaction that his mind had been relieved nevertheless.

With a supple bound the aged Arab was at his side with mats to ease the posture, speaking soothingly the while.

“The governor of the Jews at the great Roman city strongly desired to notify the Rabbi Elim of the sore need of his son,” he said, “but thou didst hinder such action by thy message sent, O my master.”

“Because I would not so sorely straiten the soul of the cherished sister by such intelligence; and the action would have availed nothing, for it were best for me to remain unmoved from the cave. Thou wert able to do all for me that were possible, O loyal one, and hast done so to the full.”

For a few moments the two now remained silent, the master enraptured with the deepening glory of the rising sun—sight of which had been denied him long—the bondman brooding over certain inferences gained from the recent conversation. Finally the latter almost unconsciously expressed in monotones an incomprehensible seeming inference which had materialized in his mind from the ruminations.

“Men made wise with much learning of the law still can be children with the true spirit of knowl-

edge which oft resteth with the sons of the desert, though these last have not letters. For rarely will the least of my brethren in his heart call a hypocrite a friend, or pass by unhonored one highly favored of Allah."

"Thy tongue proclaimeth wisdom, O son of Ishmael, and doth make shame swell in my breast," now came earnestly from Rehoboam, as he turned about, the low-uttered words having reached him. "For I also have been blind, willing to concede worth to the mighty in the world without question, but seeking to prove the claims of a certain Lowly One, though I now am convinced the last transcends the first with virtue as far as the sun is above the earth. Thou knowest the object of this sojourn in the land of Egypt, and the condemnation of my father, Saul of Tarsus, and others in rabbinical authority concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which begot it. But the matter shall be pushed no more! In the dark weeks that have passed, when my body and spirit and soul were aflame and in torment and only the good servant near to minister and comfort, an inward voice whispered: 'The Lord of Hosts hath ever been well pleased with the meek and lowly which were faithful, magnifying such to be his chosen vassals wherewith to bless mankind.' "

At this point the speaker sat bolt upright, the better to proclaim his earnest feeling. "Wherefore, I say unto thee, Tobiah, in his extremity a son of the House of Judah hath learned to follow the heart and not the head, and he now yearneth mightily to hail as Lion of the chosen tribe one that is great even as no other man hath yet been great, with righteousness, equity, and a divine love of the people; and by the gift upon the altar he now swears before thee that with such attributes there hath not risen one to hold with Jesus of Nazareth."

During the last declamation the small black eyes of the Arab glittered, and his sinewy hands clinched till the veins stood out knotted and blue; with voice vibrant with eagerness he now interrogated, lowly: "Is such an one to be given only unto Israel, my master?"

After an instant of silence the response came clear and firm: "So is interpreted from the Law and Prophets by the scribes of the temple, Tobiah; nevertheless, I am convinced that the Nazarene hath so great a love for mankind that he will gladly accept the service of all who will follow him; and it is the presence of this virtue which hath done most to make my soul believe that he is the Son of God."

Both master and servant sat many moments deeply thinking, after the last-voiced sentiment; at last the former arose and with the other's aid made arduous return to the cave, for the previous unwonted exertion of mind and body had left him weak. When settled upon mats at the mouth of the cavern, he called for a sheet of parchment and some writing fluid, briefly explaining to the bondman:

“This being the sixth day, early on the first of the week that is coming—if I be reasonably strengthened—thou shalt depart for Alexandria with package to be forwarded from thence to my father, for I would have him look for us in Jerusalem very soon. Also, the heart of my sister doubtless burneth to receive message from me, for it is many months since such was sent, and a still longer season interveneth the receiving of word from her.”

“Is it possible thou wilt so soon be able to spare thy servant?” the other inquired with the solicitude of a mother.

“Renewed life hourly swelleth in my veins to make the body stronger to endure, Tobiah. Even as the earth now warmeth under the breath of spring in the vineyards and fields of Galilee, so doth my thin blood grow red with health.” With

which statement the speaker composed himself for deep thinking.

“Rachel will joyfully receive knowledge of my changed attitude toward that One whom I was sent hither to prove,” he ruminated. “But mayhap such case will not be so with my father, the friend of Tarsus, and some others. It would be more easy to make the matter plain to them face to face than by writing. Howbeit they shall be given to know that I am no longer against the Nazarene, but for him.”

It was the knowledge that this latter point was made clear which brought an expression of satisfaction upon the face of the writer as the epistle was closed and sealed. He little guessed that this sentiment so plainly set forth was destined to be the cause of the packet’s being long detained from the intended recipient thereof by a band of pilfering Jews whose choler was strong against that certain One.

CHAPTER XX

“Neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.”—Isaiah 55. 8.

ON the morning of the first day of the week Rehoboam bade his servant to depart, insisting that there was naught to prevent.

“The dominion of mine own body hath been returned unto me again by the Lord; so trouble not thyself concerning me, loyal one!” he smiled to the latter when bidding him Godspeed, thence to add with slight curl of the lip: “And do thou in Alexandria make full statement in writing that my father will amply recompense the so-called friend with gold for the stores that must refresh us on the way to Jerusalem, seeing that circumstances have made it necessary that they be received as a loan from him.”

The old Arabian flashed a glimpse of the whites of his eyes at the speaker in response, thence urging his camel to the length of its stride.

When sight of man and beast had finally disappeared behind the limestone ridge northward, the one left behind stretched himself upon a bed

of mats just outside the cave, where the newly risen sun might shed strengthening beams upon him, thereupon occupying his mind in an endeavor to formulate arguments whereby at the return to Jerusalem his father and Saul of Tarsus might be made to partake of that believing aspect of spirit in relation to Jesus of Nazareth, which was now his own.

“The one most difficult to turn will be my friend from Tarsus,” he ruminated, the while a frown forming deep lines between the heavily penciled brows. “That man hath a will like unto the Pyramids for size and hardness, and hath become so thickly wrapped in the folds of the law that the angel of the Lord might pass him by unseen.”

After this problem had been vainly wrestled with for some while the exertion proved too great for the present state of weakness, and the mediator put the matter from him with a sigh of baffled desire, thereafter contemplating subjects which brought in their train the more grateful sense of satisfaction.

To him came mental picture of a fair-haired Jewess of regal proportions, one whom he had befriended, and last seen as companion to the cherished sister by the beautiful Wells of Qadees.

“The first message Rachel sent unto me from

Cana did proclaim that a deep friendship had sprung between herself and the Tarsean" (he smiled to himself), "and though doubtless the latter hath already been brought to the feet of him whom I now believe to be Messiah, by my sister, still there may remain somewhat of interest for me to say to her upon another matter."

It was this last train of thought which recurred many times during the ensuing days to make more pleasant the lonely hours of waiting.

As the seventh day succeeding the departure of the bondman was drawing to a close the watcher at the cave with great joy observed two minute objects issuing from a rift in the naked hills northward.

"Praise the Lord! Tobiah returneth!" he ejaculated; thence stepping with no little alacrity along the shore of Lake Qerun to meet the one approaching.

When the latter at last was at his master's side he leaped from the kneeling dromedary, embracing the young man as friend greeting friend. "Thou walkest strong as ever thou didst, glory be to Allah!" he beamed.

"A spirit strengthened by anticipation of things joyful may hasten the rejuvenation of the body, loyal one. And by the City of David I swear the

matters which now draw me home warm my heart even as that mission which fetched us hence tended to make it like unto the alabarch's; which last state may heaven always hinder! But speak! was a packet from my father awaiting thy fetch-ing from the governor's?"

The one addressed passed a hand beneath the folds of his tunic, bringing forth two packages both carefully wrapped in linen and sealed.

"Now am I highly favored with double of that which was desired," Rehoboam exclaimed. But upon reaching for the inscribed missives a certain expression upon the face of the Arab held his attention.

"Thou hast somewhat upon thy mind which troubleth thee, son of the open," he said. "Reveal the matter quickly for I would share thy burden."

"That which burneth within is for my master's sake; howbeit it were better he were told the matter at once," the other spoke, simply, continuing in tones striven to be dispassionate. "One of the messages did reach Alexandria at a season many months past, O my master, but was mislaid and forgotten by him whom thy father knows as friend. Thus is it that thou art now so highly favored."

A mighty anger now flashed from the dark eyes of the son of Rabbi Elim. "So!" he muttered;

thereupon casting a look almost of repugnance upon the extra camel equipped with stores which had been brought from Alexandria. "Would that I might send all which hath proceeded from him to the bottom of the lake, Tobiah; such action would but hurt ourselves, however, so let us to the cave where refreshment awaiteth thee; and whilst thou partakest thereof I will open the packets."

Still trembling from the choler which had been suppressed, the young Jew commenced reading the delayed epistle, which was from his father. In a very few moments his free hand was excitedly stroking the black, thick-flowing beard.

"A plague upon the priests and scribes! they know not what they do," he exclaimed. "If condemnation against that Righteous Man was thus strongly with them so long ago, what may the outcome of it now be?"

"Thy return to Jerusalem will be well for the Nazarene, O my master," the bondman ventured in response.

"Whether it prove well for him or ill for me, there shall be one of the House of Judah to follow in his train," the other returned with great vehemence; thereupon finishing the perusal of the missive in silence.

As the reader turned to the second package the

compressed lip lines softened to a smile of anticipation. "Without doubt word is here from the cherished sister, and safely it may be wagered there will be much of welcome confidence contained," he told himself.

And so it transpired; the man had no more than passed brief but heartfelt greetings expressed in characters unmistakably feminine, when an expression of astonished incredulity transformed the strong-molded contours of his face, which gave place in an instant to a look of joyous conviction.

"In the words of David, the great singer, 'Praise the Lord, O my soul!'" he cried; thence jubilantly turning toward the one taking refreshment.

"Hark, Tobiah! Raphael, the younger and greatly loved cousin, crippled from the cradle, hath been marvelously made whole by a word from Jesus of Nazareth. And my sister hath been given unto him in marriage instead of to his elder brother. Now does my spirit truly magnify the Lord and give homage to that One who hath been so greatly anointed with power; for ever did I hold the great brute Abimelech as an evil-hearted son of Balak. As Jehovah liveth I will henceforth stand for the Nazarene though all Jerusalem be turned against him."

"May the mercy of Allah and length of days

ever be with the Great Prophet," the aged Arab murmured, earnestly.

But Rehoboam did not hear this benediction; the script which immediately followed the previous reading engaged attention far too deeply to permit of it.

"It hath been rumored that the high priest is bent upon the death of the son of Mary, and O my brother, never will there live such another," were the words that burned as fire into the soul of the man, causing the veins upon his neck to swell and throb. But without uttered comment his eyes continued along the scroll of parchment.

"Canst thou not return and intercede for him, Rehoboam? Thy sister's soul hath been saved from a life of torment and darkness by his word; return ere it is too late, I beseech thee!"

And now the son of Rabbi Elim stood forth straight and tall, and the look upon his face boded ill for some one.

"May the darkness of everlasting torment close upon the one who conceived this ill against an innocent man!" he thundered. Thereupon, seeing the countenance of the Arab transformed with wonder, the denouncer more moderately continued in explanation.

"The chosen nation of the Lord, even Israel,

hath so greatly fallen that her high priest doth go about to kill that One whom I believe is anointed to be the King of the Jews."

For a long moment the scion of the House of Judah and the son of Ishmael gazed at each other, nonplussed with the significance of the last statement; and then the Arabian inquired, lowly:

"Couldst thou not intercede with thy father and others of the temple in behalf of the Great Prophet, O my master?"

The one addressed now turned away with drooping mien. "That will I with all mine heart; but who can prevail against the high priest?" he said, in an instant to add with rising confidence: "Nevertheless, let us be stirring to have all ready for a start toward Jerusalem, even as Lucifer burneth in the sky to-morrow; for now has Nizan [March] begun and we must make haste to reach the Holy City ere the Passover commenceth, for at such season aught of moment troubling the priest and elders is wont to be brought to account, and it may be that the Nazarene is to suffer judgment at that time. Whilst strength of body is with me, from start to finish of our journey the camels shalt not slacken their stride by day till Jerusalem be gained."

Thus proclaimed the man, forgetting that the

will of the Omnipotent One oft differs from even the most well-intentioned plans of his children.

Once in the history of Israel the light of day had been changed suddenly to night's darkness out of due season. Such miracle was to be performed again.

CHAPTER XXI

"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall."—*Isaiah 40. 30.*

THE morning star was indeed sovereign in the east as master and bondman left the cave on the morning following, and mounting their camels moved swiftly along the shore of Lake Qerun in an easterly direction, amid the vast stillness of that barren country the only objects with sign of animation. Despite the vaunted return of full vigor, the undulating motion of the steeds was at first a trial for the one so lately recovered from sickness; but youth, clean habits of living, and great natural strength of physique were on his side, and the motion of the journey gradually became unnoticed. True to his vow, on this day the pace slackened not till the sun had dropped behind the shadowy hills which had been left, and so swift had been the passage that the decaying walls of that city which once had been the glory of the Pharaohs thence could be seen to the left as a thing grimed and battered, with the shining reach of the Nile showing beyond as a band of silver.

"Upon beds of ease in the city we shall rest this night, Tobiah," Rehoboam declaimed with eager

anticipation. "And well that it is so, for my body acheth for rest. Nevertheless, the spirit still burneth for the journey, and wilt give strength to the flesh in the days to come."

After the night of comfort spent in Memphis the two wayfarers arose much refreshed, and were the first to be ferried across the placidly flowing Nile. Thenceforth they journeyed steadfastly by day, unmindful of the desolate land which surrounded them, and for the most part unnoting the many points of historical interest to the chosen people; their minds being wholly centered upon the reaching of Jerusalem before the time of the Passover had set in.

At length the verdant water-fed valley of Kadesh Barnea was at hand, and well it was for the son of Rabbi Elim. The riding in the glare of the sun for such length of time had taxed his endurance to the utmost, and as he gratefully stretched himself upon the very spot of the stream's margin where Rachel had told him of her renunciation of self for another, conviction that a considerable season of rest was imperative dwelt heavily with him.

"Do thou prepare the evening's refreshment and fetch it hither to me, Tobiah," he murmured, adding with a forced smile, "Mayhap if I yield wholly

to the ministering of this oasis, strength for the morrow's journey will be increased."

But the man was not able to travel on the day following; and the possible import of the delay in connection with the welfare of a Certain One caused him to groan in anguish of spirit. Four days he lay thus by the whispering stream, caring naught for the marvelous contrast of beauty which the vicinity showed against the desolation bordering it on every side; dwelling even not at all upon that glad season of intercourse with the fair-faced damsel and the loved sister which had been spent in the selfsame place; to reach the Holy City before the preparation of the Passover was the theme of his soul, day and night.

At last power of body was again restored to the one so greatly desiring it, but as the beautiful valley was left, even under the twinkling light of the stars, only three days intervened the approaching season of religious preparation.

"Ere the sun setteth thrice we should reach Jerusalem, if all goes well; in time to give aid to the Nazarene, if such in truth is needed," Rehoboam had spoken with hopeful voice upon mounting his camel for the start. But premonition of some great calamity in close connection with the man of Galilee burned strongly within him nevertheless.

CHAPTER XXII

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.”—*Isaiah 55. 6.*

AT the beginning of the third morning after the departure from Kadesh Barnea, Rehobam and his faithful servant were yet some thirty miles from Jerusalem. After brief refreshment they had hastened forward with the stars as only guidance upon the way, traveling silent as shadows, and at a pace which cast distance rearward as only the gait of a camel can accomplish. Of a sudden their vision was entranced by three marvelous bands of gold which appeared in the eastern horizon, stretching outwardly toward the sleeping world; and through a peculiar formation of cloud strata each of the mighty shafts converged from a blood red point—the crown of the sun itself.

“A strange-showing sky, portending great climatical disturbance over the desert,” the former muttered, then speaking in somewhat louder tones, “Readest thou aught of moment from yonder sky, Tobiah?”

The old Arabian gazed intently eastward a mo-

ment, thereupon to reply with conviction, "If so be it is a sign of meaning, O my master, the whole earth is shortly to suffer disturbance and confusion."

But the other now threw back his shoulders as one desiring to be rid of unpleasant thoughts. "Mayhap we are but croaking as unbelieving soothsayers, seeking that which the Lord hath hid from us in wisdom," he observed. "See, loyal one, the sun with gold is glorified as he riseth; the morning will be fair." After which last declaration the way was followed a long season without converse.

As the sixth hour approached the two travelers had passed Hebron and were following the line of the Jordan hills toward Bethlehem. A sense of pleasant anticipation was with Rehoboam, for was he not very near his father's house after having spent many weary months in a far country? And although all had not transpired as had been planned or desired at the beginning of the mission, nevertheless an eager hope of accomplishing something of far greater worth was now making his eyes bright and his temples throb.

"If naught transpireth to interfere, we shall reach Jerusalem in the eighth hour, Tobiah!" he exclaimed with jubilation, as a crest of a hill was

gained from whence the gray turrets of the natal town of David could be seen.

The one thus addressed remained silent an instant, the while intently scanning the rugged horizon line to the north. Finally the response came in tones which endeavored to cover a sense of agitation.

“If our journey is to be so prospered, we must indeed hasten, my master. Dost thou mark the dark cloud even now gathering above where Jerusalem lieth?”

With attention thus fixed the other shaded his eyes with his hand the better to make observation, for the glare of noontide was exceedingly bright.

“Surely, the heavens doth show forth marvelous signs this day,” he spoke at length with voice expressing perturbation unreservedly, and continuing with increased excitement: “By the rod of Aaron! the sun in his strength directly above us is being veiled by vestment of thick vapor although cloud bank hath not marred the sky! The thing is uncanny, and my spine crawleth with apprehension!”

The speaker now raised his arms above his head in astonishment.

“Stay, son of the open! We must halt the camels in their tracks though Satan himself should

now be loosed against the Nazarene in Jerusalem, for the darkness of the pit is descending upon us and we cannot go on ! What makest thou of it?"

"Naught, save that it is a visitation from Allah and portendeth great woe to men," moaned the Arabian, smiting his breast ; then to leap from his beast and cast himself upon the ground.

And this conviction was not a false one. The brilliancy of midday had suddenly given place to the blackness of night once again for the sake of Israel ; but not as heretofore was the awful manifestation sent to loose the chosen people from their bondage ; rather was it a sign that they should be scattered as lost sheep ; even they that had brought the evil upon themselves free-willed ! and upon children yet unborn.

Three long and terrible hours the two so eager to reach the Holy City lay upon the earth face downward, with the camels squatting beside them, man and beast alike aquake with mortal fear, and the darkness seemed to sink into the very marrow of their bones with malignancy, as though the arch fiend and his hateful crew were themselves hid in the shadows and casting darts of evil at the confounded ones.

And then, lo ! a thunderbolt rent heaven from end to end, and the ground leaped beneath the

shock, and yet again, while the frenzied men were tossed up and about as feathers in a gale, even as objects spewed out from the earth in wrath. And high above the thundering and the horror and the confusion one awful note of tortured anguishing sorrow seemed to rise dominant, to make all else as naught save an accompaniment to its own cry of misery.

When all was still again, and sunbeams streamed golden from a cloudless sky, the master got unsteadily upon his feet, thence to reach forth and almost lift his bondman up, for the latter seemed nearly bereft of strength.

“Didst thou hear that cry of agony, Tobiah?” the younger man whispered with ashen lips. “As surely as Jehovah liveth there was in it a note of majesty that hath been part of but one voice I have ever heard upon the earth; even the voice of Jesus of Nazareth. Speak, thou sharp-eared child of the desert! Heardst thou it also?”

“Even so,” the other muttered; his head drooping upon his breast.

And now anguish of soul was indeed with the son of the House of Judah. “O my God, I am too late!” he moaned; covering his face with quivering palms. “Thy Messiah would have been friend and brother unto me, but I would not! And now I

may not see his face. And what hath Israel done in thy sight this day?"

At last the two remounted their camels and again headed for Jerusalem, but joyful and eager anticipation was no longer with them.

CHAPTER XXIII

“If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”
—*John 15. 20.*

THE first watch of the night was at hand as the two returned from a far country proceeded from the Valley of the Kedron toward the Fountain Gate, and shadows were thick over the land of Judah. Since the season of terrible manifestation they had met no person able to impart certain information regarding the whereabouts of the Nazarene, although knowledge of the animosity which the priests and elders of the people held against him was found to be widespread. However, Rehoboam was confident of quickly learning all that was to be known in the matter which haunted his soul after the city walls were entered. A greater concourse was gathered about the gate than was usual even for the eve of the Preparation, but it was threaded without halt being made for inquiries; nor was aught spoken to the Roman guards, for remembrance still burned of the insolence of the soldiers at the departure from Tiberias nearly three years ago.

The narrow, winding streets of Jerusalem also seemed unwontedly thronged this especial season of the Passover; knots of excitedly gesticulating Jews obstructed the dark way at every turn, and finally the son of Rabbi Elim paused to accost a loud-talking group whose subject of conversation was very evidently relative to some unusual event which had recently transpired.

“Peace be unto you,” he greeted, and as silence fell upon them, he inquired: “Sirs, hath aught been done this day in Jerusalem against Jesus of Nazareth, who hath been called Christ?”

For an instant the entire party seemed thunderstruck. By the light of a torch which one held they peered at the questioner with eyes bulging and jaws agape, apparently without power of speech. But at last one stepped forward, a long-bearded, coarsely clothed Galilæan, most evidently a rustic.

“Dwellest thou in these parts and yet remainest unknowing of what was done at Golgotha at the sixth hour?” he demanded, sharply, to quickly add, “And if thou be thus ignorant, how cometh it that such a question is put?”

In calm and unruffled tones the explanation was given.

“Even at the season thou didst mention, sir, I

and my servant were some two hours' journey hence, speeding thitherward, when the sun shining in his strength was suddenly veiled and night descended upon the earth. Until the ninth hour darkness of Hades encompassed us about, when the earth was rent with awful quaking; and above the horror and confusion there came unto mine ears a cry that shall not be forgotten in this life, no, nor in the life to come. And the tone of the voice was that of Jesus of Nazareth."

As the speaker ceased making the matter plain his hearers one and all began whispering together, and with sundry nudgings and shrugging of shoulders showing that his words had greatly stirred them. Finally the spokesman came very near him, desiring to communicate that which was desired not to ring loudly through the street.

"Thy question shalt now be answered, stranger," he said. And then in an undertone, "This Jesus who claimed to be Messiah was crucified on Calvary at high noon. But whether he had aught to do with the darkening of the sun and the earth's rending, I know not; and thousands in Jerusalem art now discussing such question, as were we when thou didst hail us."

During the imparting of this information Rehoboam stood transfixed with horror, the very blood

seeming to have congealed in his veins ; and as the voice of the Galilæan ceased his arms were upthrown in a gesture of emotion ; as they had been once before that day.

“Woe unto the chosen people of the Lord ! They have killed a righteous man, even the Son of God !” he moaned.

At this the gruff tones of one standing by sounded with admonishment.

“Friend, thou hadst best curb thy tongue, for there are those about this night who may deem thee a malefactor also, if thou dost thus openly acknowledge thy belief in the Nazarene.”

“How sayest thou a malefactor ? That One martyred at the sixth hour hath not done an evil act in all his life. Wherefore a disciple is but honored in owning him as Master,” was returned, angrily.

As these words were spoken a small company of men, evidently Sadducees of the upper class from the fashion of their flowing garments, quickly approached from a side street ; and one of their number, a huge rawboned fellow, at this point cried in tones of unmistakable animosity, “By the tomb of Rachel, here is a follower of the King of the Jews brazenly proclaiming the fact to the four winds. Hath not Caiaphas, the high priest, issued

decree that such be held for trial? Come, let us take him," and with long strides the speaker made for the offending one.

At this the group of rustics had precipitately fled, but in a trice Tobiah the faithful had leaped from his camel and was between the two.

"Hold, O master," he implored. "I swear by the Pyramids of Egypt that we have just come from the desert and have not seen Jerusalem for three years, until this night."

A certain intelligence conveyed by the old Arab's words of entreaty caused the malignant-minded young Hebrew to violently start, and smothering an imprecation he easily twitched the former aside with one hand, thence endeavoring to obtain a view of Rehoboam's face without allowing his own to be seen.

"Give me the torch, Mara," he threw over his shoulder; and as the features of the man thus revealed stood out distinctly a curse was again inwardly breathed.

"Fall back with the light," now came the command; and then was tauntingly flung into the teeth of the astonished son of Rabbi Elim, even as a slap in the face:

"Ye would know the connection between him whom thou championest and a malefactor? Be-

tween Barabbas and a thief he was crucified, and wast numbered even as they."

The words carried with them all the venom that cruel hate could give, and the square jaws of the one upon whom they were cast clicked together hard.

"Son of a jackal!" he rasped. "Thou blasphemest against the God of thy fathers; for though Pilate himself did condemn the Nazarene, I say that from the sixth hour to the ninth heaven itself proved him to be he that was to have ransomed Israel."

The fury of a wild beast now possessed the flouted giant; beside himself, he reached for a heavy staff which had been dropped by one of the louts that had fled, and raising it high above the head of the other, swung down with all the force of a mighty pair of arms.

A piercing scream rent the air, and again the bondman sprang before his master in protection; and upon the turbaned head the club descended with sickening thud. A cry of remonstrance now rang from the companions of the murderer, and the torch bearer rushed forward wildly waving his sputtering fagots.

"Beware! O thou Abimelech!" the latter warned. "Already there lieth upon the heads of the chosen

people overmuch innocent blood spilt for the Pass-over this day. Stay thy hand, man!"

But the warning was useless; as the aged servant fell, Rehoboam shot forward as from a catapult, thrusting his face, working with passion, directly at the evil countenance of his antagonist, for now he also would discover an identity.

And then he saw and understood.

"Abimelech, my cousin! Evil-hearted always, and now a murderer! Take that, and that! Thou that wouldest have wed my Rachel." And terrible biting blows fell thick and fast.

But the night was dark and the torch's illumination shifted this way and that. The man, incensed with righteous fury, failed to plant his fists upon a vital point in his adversary, and, ducking aside, the latter recovered his staff and again brought it whistling down.

Vainly did the son of Rabbi Elim the Strong endeavor to evade the blow; it fell true; through his brain flashed a blinding streak of light, and then all was void to him.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Prayer also shall be made for him continually."—*Psalms 72. 15.*

CONTRARY to what might have been supposed, the home in Tiberias owned by Rehoboam and Rachel was not sealed when the latter was given to Raphael to wife.

"My spirit greatly desireth that the place should be open to welcome my brother when he returneth," the bride had said to her husband, and at once he had agreed to reside there for awhile.

But the absent one did not return; and in spite of the great joy which had come to the woman, her heart was greatly saddened thereby.

At a certain season, as the couple were enjoying the cooling breezes from the Sea of Galilee upon the roof of this their first home together, the young wife was moved to reveal the depth of her grief concerning the matter.

"A year hath passed, and more, since tidings came unto Jerusalem from Rehoboam, my husband," trembled from her lips in spite of a great effort to control the emotion; thereupon was added: "And father's friend in Alexandria did

send a strangely involved epistle three months ago, from which we were left quite uncertain as to whether he knew of the wanderer's whereabouts or no."

The speaker now turned her face directly toward the man, the great love there shining forcing all other expressions to contribute to itself.

"Thou light of my life," she continued, softly, "I have written fully unto him of that wonderful thing which was done unto thee; also of the great joy which was caused to be mine thereby; but the message could not have been received, for answer hath not come."

The one addressed passed an arm fondly about the other while a certain memory made very confident the tone of his response.

"The God of our fathers hath marvelously smiled upon us through his Son, and wilt not leave the cherished brother desolate, O thou greatly beloved."

For a season this answer brought balm to Rachel, and she rested silently and contented nestled close in her husband's embrace. Then her thoughts gradually centered about the Certain One through whom so great a blessing had come to them, and deep sorrow drew upon her soul again. Withdrawing to upright posture, she

raised eyes brimming with sad appeal to the blue ones so near, the while asking, earnestly:

“Husband, reveal thy mind plainly concerning what thou knowest of the dangers which threaten him whom we believe to be Messiah. Heretofore the matter hath been veiled from me by thee through kind intent, but from others I know the high priest doth desire to take his life. Speak clearly now, for a voice within strongly moveth me to ask thee.”

For an instant the man thus adjured remained silent; he then arose, and taking his companion by the hand led her from the shelter of the summer house wherein they had been resting to the parapet of the roof which overlooked the Sea of Galilee.

“Thou seest that expanse of blue calmness, with water fowl skimming hither and yon, constantly threatening to plunge into the deep and mar its unruffled surface, my wife?” he inquired, gently.

“Even so!” was answered, wonderingly.

“Then, O Rachel, thou hast pictured unto thine eyes even what doth now encompass Jesus of Nazareth; and the manner in which he moveth under it. Daily—yea, hourly—the priests and elders of the people threaten to descend upon him violently with all manner of evil intent; but he continueth to work mightily with power to bless

all that are afflicted, and doth seem as untroubled by his enemies as yonder reach of deep waters is untroubled by the birds of prey which hover over it."

A long moment the other stood watching the calm and beautiful sea, pondering the similitude which had been shown her, and then she turned with a glad smile of understanding.

"Truly, thou dost know the Nazarene in love," she said, simply, to add after an instant's hesitation: "And my soul constantly poureth petitions unto Jehovah that my brother may some day know him thus also."

At this point a light of hope appeared in the speaker's dark eyes, and her tones had in them a note of eager anticipation as she continued.

"Thou hast well known of the affection which Rehoboam hath always borne for thee, my Raphael! also of that proportionate dislike, amounting almost to hatred, which was held for Abimelech. Will not the performing of that wonderful miracle which made thee whole and gave unto me a true husband, outweigh the adverse counsels of Saul of Tarsus and others, and make even the son of my father a disciple of the Nazarene when he returneth to find thee straight and strong before his eyes? Such aspect of the case I took for granted

when writing the last epistle unto him, revealing my joy."

"I believe thy brother will give honor, and mayhap his heart also, unto Jesus of Nazareth when he doth return; for he is a just man and hath not the deep-seated prejudice against a new doctrine which is so strongly with most scribes of the law," the other could truthfully answer.

"Then let us on bended knee with our faces toward Jerusalem, offer supplications unto the God of Israel for the protection of that One so menaced by the priests and elders, and for the speedy return of Rehoboam also, for it is all we have power to do," Rachel breathed with much earnestness, to subjoin lowly, "And it may be that the fulfillment of the latter request will prove an instrument in the granting of the former."

And as the prayers of the two arose, who can say that such act of love did not minister to the need of the King of Glory far more than could the combined strength of all the armies of the earth?

CHAPTER XXV

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—*Matthew 5. 10.*

THE time of the Passover was even at hand, and blind, and unprepared by divine decree, Judah opened foul, sin-reeking jaws uttering condemnation against the Son of the Most High. Then was the Lion of the chosen tribe crucified by the people of the Lord.

To the last hour did Rachel and her consort rest hope in the timely return of Rehoboam; but the wanderer came not back unto them, and on the night directly following the crucifixion the former lay upon a couch in the most remote chamber of the house in Tiberias, dry-eyed and haggard of countenance, mourning even as mourned many another faithful daughter of Abraham. And by her side, with stately head bent low with grief, was Sarah of Tarsus; while on a mat upon the floor face down and sobbing as only a man can sob, Raphael lay—three disciples in truth of the Man of Sorrows.

And the Sabbath dawned fair over Judaea and Israel; the first golden beams of the sun glancing

to the hoary peak of Mount Hermon in the far north, thence to crown the lesser heights in a wonderful succession of glory, finally to bathe the gilded temple at Jerusalem in a dazzling robe of splendor. And even as all nature appeared smiling and beautiful the Prince of Life lay white and still, sealed in a sepulcher. Thus is proved that outward glitter and fair display can be the very worst of delusions.

But another drop was added to Rachel's cup of lamenting, a drop which was robbed of bitterness nevertheless. In the second watch of the evening of the Sabbath a bondman from the house of Rabbi Elim reached Tiberias in a condition bordering utter exhaustion. Eighty miles he had been borne by swift camel, with but scant season of rest in Samaria, where change of steed was made, for the import of a message which he brought meant much to that one for whom it was intended, and he was a faithful servant.

As the daughter read the parchment inscribed by a father in the darkest, most baffled moment of his life—written in a strong man's frenzy of grief and choler—a smile touched the trembling of her lips, even as tears of quiet sorrow coursed freely down. Turning to her husband and the Tarsean—for both were near—she quaveringly whispered:

“Rehoboam hath returned unto Jerusalem to acknowledged belief in the Nazarene.” And in answer to the look of astonished inquiry upon the faces of the two, the explanation was given in tones calm with resignation: “During the night which hath but passed word came unto the house of my father that the cherished and long-expected son had been done unto death even in the streets of the City of David for openly testifying in behalf of that One so lately crucified! Tobiah, the bondman, was murdered likewise, and his body remaineth to his friends; but the body of my brother hath been hid by the murderers. Also a packet did come to light which Rehoboam sent from Alexandria telling of his expected return; which letter was pillaged by some lawless ones and thus delayed.

“O my friend and mine husband, let us weep together in sorrow for the one that hath been taken! But our souls shall give thanks also to the Lord, for he hath answered the incessant prayers of my soul. Though a son of the House of Judah hath returned too late to save the King of the Jews, yet surely he hath followed the dictates of his heart at last and proven himself a loyal follower—a disciple indeed!”

And together they wept, giving thanks the while.

CHAPTER XXVI

“He is risen.”—Matthew 28. 6.

EARLY in the morning of the first day of the week Rachel awoke with an indefinable sense of exhilaration upon her soul. She carefully arose—for Raphael was sleeping—and donning a loose-fitting robe of finest silk noiselessly moved along a balcony toward a flight of stairs leading to the roof, for a potent influence of inward guidance seemed to draw her upward and out under the open sky.

There was no moon, and the stars were fast becoming pale against the brightening heavens—all save one, which shone clear and perfect in the east as a marvelous gem, prince of the sons of morning.

“Even as the morning star now shineth through the gloom with matchless virtue, so Jesus of Nazareth stood forth in mine eyes from the world of weakness and transgression,” the watcher mused, making way to a place where a far-reaching view of the dimly showing landscape might be obtained. “But he hath been taken away, even as

yon brightly burning orb must depart before the coming of the sun. Howbeit a greater than the Man of Galilee will not arise in Israel."

As the woman pondered the riddle so strongly apparent in the matter, imperceptibly the shadows were pushed westward, and in the east, beyond the silvered sea, still far beyond, bright beams of gold were framing violet hills to a cameo of glory. And as the wonder intensified each moment Rachel's perplexity of mind vanished quite away and her heart leaped with ecstasy.

"Surely, the Matchless One who hath caused such splendor will not leave the soul of his Messiah in the bowels of the earth, though wicked men did slay his body," she breathed. "And even as my spirit proclaimeth this, so doth it cry that Rehoboam will be ever near the One he acknowledged in love at last, for Jehovah, the God of my fathers, is compassionate and of tender mercies." And a smile transformed the fashion of her face.

At this instant the princely figure of a man appeared upon the roof. A loose gown of spotless linen clothed him, girt at the waist with a girdle set with sapphires; and a mass of waving hair yellow as gold of Ophir crowned a countenance beautiful as an angel's.

"All hail to thee, my bride!" this apparition

greeted, approaching the mate of his heart with buoyant step.

“Welcome art thou at my side, O my husband,” was returned in cadence low and sweet. “Sleep had departed from mine eyes at the crowing of the cock; and a marvelous sense of joy and peace upon my soul seemed to compel me to come up hither,” the speaker finished, still smiling a welcome.

“Thou shouldst have aroused thy husband that he might have shared yonder marvelous dawning with thee,” the other playfully chided, taking the place that was offered him. “Howbeit the favor of seeing thy face in silhouette against that distant wonder, fair as a rose of Sharon, would not have been mine if thou hadst,” and with infinitely gentle touch the speaker drew his wife to him.

After a moment he continued, “Strange as it seemeth, Rachel, upon awaking a prompting within also drew me up and to the open, quite apart from the desire to find thee. To have stayed in the closeness of the chamber would have been as the keeping of one that lived entombed.”

The pressure of the hand which the one addressed now gave her spouse expressed understanding far better than words could have done; the two then silently faced the east, watching with

rapture the mighty flaming disk as it was magnified, at last to completely bathe the far hills with radiance and form unto their very base a path of glory upon the sea.

Finally the man spoke, almost subconsciously:

“Even as the sun now proveth that day will ever vanquish night, so the latter proclaimeth to my spirit that the life of the Nazarene hath not been forever blotted out in darkness, for surely it did shine with virtue, and must triumph in the end.”

“Thy lips speak truth, mate of my soul; and even such conviction wast with me also before thou camest upon the roof,” the other murmured, to finish, lowly, “The path he made was like unto that stretching across the sea—a way of glory.”

Several uneventful days filled with simple duties now passed over the young couple. Save for Philemon and two other servants they were quite alone, for Sarah of Tarsus had departed to Jerusalem; but they had no desire for immediate intercourse with others of the outer world, their thoughts yet being filled with the recent events of such deep moment to them. However, when the stately Tarsean again entered the gate of their home one afternoon—quite unexpectedly—Rachel hastened forward with greeting eagerly, for the two were indeed as sisters.

"Enter and be welcome, thou fair one!" she cried, saluting the guest warmly on either cheek; and then a certain something showing in the latter's face caused her to step back in wonder.

"Surely, never hath such radiant joy beamed forth from thee before as now plainly dwelleth upon thy countenance, to my remembrance at least, O sister," she exclaimed. "Reveal the glad matter if thou mayest, for in truth my spirit needeth to smile for some other's sake these days."

"Thy soul shall indeed smile, and leap with joy for its own sake as well as another's when my tongue giveth its good burden, tender one," was earnestly responded. "Go find thy husband and bring him hither that he may hear also," and gently the speaker pushed her hostess away, for the message which she bore burned to be spoken.

With winged feet Rachel sought her consort, the while her heart's throbbing seeming to beat out a wild question of hope: "Hath it transpired that Rehoboam is not dead? The message from my father said they had not found his body; only the forlorn remains of poor Tobiah. O God of mercy! may it be proven that my brother hath not been killed?"

When the three at last stood together in a recess of a private court, the light from above clearly

made plain an expression of tense expectancy upon the young wife's features usually so softly curving, and, seeing it, Sarah of Tarsus suddenly divined the cause, thence reaching forth a fond and strength-giving arm.

“The message which I bring is concerning Jesus of Nazareth, my sister!” she said; seeing that it were best to come straight to the point. “He lieth not longer in the tomb—*but is risen!*”

For an instant not a muscle of the two listeners moved, not an eyelid quivered; they were absolutely without power of speech; then the blood flowed in the face of Raphael, and he bounded high in air.

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, Messiah liveth!” he shouted as through a trumpet; thence confronting the bringer of the marvelous tidings with eager question: “Didst see him face to face, O thou favored one?”

The eyes of the one addressed lowered in attitude of great humility under this inquiry.

“Such privilege was not mine,” she said, simply. “It was given unto my cousin, Mary, she whom the power of this same Jesus did make in truth Magdalene, the magnificent.”

And now a wondrous sense of tranquillity entered Rachel's soul, driving quite away the as-

tonished confusion of mind which had held her spellbound. Taking the beautiful hand of the Tarsean, which so lovingly caressed, and reaching to Raphael to draw him very near, she looked from one to the other with eyes bright with serene gladness.

“The Star out of Jacob hath arisen to ransom Israel, O thou greatly beloved of my soul! Even as John of the desert did proclaim, ‘He is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ And if he lives, shall not my brother live also, who was slain for his sake?”

And the answer that was given by the two, though silent and unspoken, brought added peace indeed to Rachel; for it was the communion of heart with heart by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Risen Son of God!

CHAPTER XXVII

"There is no other God that can deliver after this sort."—
Daniel 3. 29.

ON board a large fishing smack which careened and bobbed amid many others of its kind upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean outside of the port of Joppa all was scurry and confusion, for the fleet had just returned well laden with spoil from the deep, and such part of the cargo which had not been salted down must needs be marketed with great expedition. To be exact it must be stated, however, that upon the bark particularly designated marked rapidity of movement was with every member of the crew save one, a stalwart, black-bearded young Hebrew whose strong-molded features wore a vacant expression as a mask constantly, and whose measured gait was purely mechanical, for intelligence from the brain had no part in it.

The latter's slow performance of his simple duties drew upon him an unending succession of cursings, cuffs, kicks, in fact, every variety of ill usage which might occur to a seafaring brute on such an occasion of trouble; and the mindless one

took all without sign of retaliation, even as a little child.

But devilishness will sometimes overreach itself.

The captain of the bark was a Roman; a man of mighty temper and bulk who gave allegiance to naught save brawn and drink. Because of the former idol he held a certain admiration for the one long-limbed, tough-sinewed Jew who served him, and had no desire to be rid of such an able hand. But the affliction of the latter was a constant cause of ferocious eruptions, and upon the present occasion of much-needed hurry the skipper became beside himself with fury at the inane one.

“As Cæsar liveth, I'll make ye jump once!” he bawled at last; and wrenching a stave from an old cask, a stinging cruel blow that left deep gashes was dealt directly across the bare knuckles of the delinquent.

Nevertheless, the Jew did not jump. After an instant of violent shuddering he simply ceased labor entirely, turning wide and staring gaze at the tormentor.

This was too much for the choler of the Roman; emitting a vile curse he leaped at the offender as a wild beast, bringing the stave with terrible force down upon the defenseless head.

One of the crew, an Athenian, bore the stricken

one below to his own hard and knobby bunk. In earlier and more prosperous days this man had striven in the lists before Cæsar, and he had as great an admiration for a fine physique as did the burly captain.

"The misguided son of Mars hath struck once too hard to please even his own heart of evil," he muttered while performing this slight act of good feeling. To continue with frequent interjections of blasphemous nature. "And unless the Jew's skull be harder than the walls of the royal stadium he is done for this time."

The Greek's last ejaculation would seem to imply that the stricken man had once before been nearly brought to death by violence; howbeit the present injury was indeed serious, for blood flowed copiously from a great gash in the crown of the latter's head, and his face was white as chalk, and seemingly quite as lifeless.

A day and a night did this son of Abraham lie without consciousness, and twice was the perpetrator of the crime of more than half a mind to secretly pitch him into the sea as the best and quickest way out of the trouble; but the heart of the man from Athens was not yet entirely congealed by vice, and being a very able seaman his intercessions were not ignored.

And at a moment when it was quite unlooked for by any one of the smack's crew, signs of life began to become apparent upon the features of the prostrate Hebrew. First the eyelids quivered, then as strength increased the lips drew to a forming of incoherent sounds, and at last returning vitality came with a rush and he sat up, gazing with great astonishment at the dark, uncouth quarters where boxes and strong-smelling barrels of salt fish cumbered almost every inch of room, even to the very edge of the bunk in which he lay.

And now a marvelous thing was made manifest; the eyes of the newly resuscitated one shone with a light of full intelligence, and raising a shaking hand to the blood-smeared brow he seemed to be endeavoring to recall something that had just slipped his memory. Suddenly the matter came to him, and involuntarily he cried aloud with weak voice, "Son of a jackal! Thou that wouldest have wed my Rachel!" and then he sank back almost in a swoon again from the strain of the effort.

Just at this moment the Athenian descended a ladder to that compartment in the hold of the bark which gave room for his bunk, and a part of the trembling ejaculation reached him.

"By the Olympic crown, I swear the Jew is

alive and hath found tongue wherewith to utter tirade," he marveled. "In truth his body will not die, if his brain has; but there will be perdition to pay if this sort of talk lets loose on deck," with which inwardly expressed sentiment the place of his wonted sleeping was reached and he leaned against it, awaiting further demonstration of animation from the one thereon.

And the wait was not long. Again opening eyes of wondering lucidness Rehoboam slowly raised to sitting posture, and after feeling of the swelling lump upon his head, turned to the Greek with the question, "What did they with the beast that struck me?"

"Go easy, my hearty; if the skipper hears any of that variety of converse from any beside himself, there will be the devil raised and a head smashed clean in, I'm thinking," the other advised. To finish with a vast attempt to be soothing, "But lie back a bit, man. Ye will soon be lively as usual—which does not guarantee much after all—and to-morrow we put to sea and all will run smooth as a jellyfish; if ye act natural, that is."

But the son of Rabbi Elim did not lie back. Instead he swung both feet out of the bunk and got totteringly to his feet, thence to take a few steps and sink panting upon an overturned cask, cast-

ing amazed glances at his dirty and strange-seeming garb of a fisherman the while.

"Thou must get me ashore, for I would be in my father's house," he gasped; to finish after an instant's respite, "I know not what thou pratest of, or why such clothes be upon me."

"Now thou speakest sense," the other responded in the humoring tones he would have used to a child, to continue in vein of pleasant sarcasm: "And 'twill soon be well that thou art not overmindful of what is said unto thee, or what is laid upon thy back. As for thy father's house, thou didst come very near being in it a season past; but it seemeth as though Old Neptune must wait a bit."

At this speech the convalescent again passed a hand across his forehead, with desire to prove that clear reason was indeed therein. Seeming reassured thereby, he looked the seaman up and down with no little irritation.

"Either thou art a fool, or deemest me one, my man," he now said, with some strength; to continue without allowing opportunity for rejoinder, "Howbeit let us drop such question. I see through yonder port that we lie in Joppa harbor. Do thou get me ashore with haste, and it is promised that twenty pieces of silver shall be given thee as re-

ward, for I am known of certain usurers in the city and can obtain credit from them."

The unmistakable saneness contained in these remarks caused the Athenian to start; stepping nearer the speaker of them, he scanned the strongly fashioned face with searching look. The clearly showing intelligence in the black eyes which met him so unflinchingly transformed a suspicion that had entered his mind to almost certain conviction. Sinking against a huge upturned barrel, in attitude of utter amazement, he ejaculated:

"Once thy brains were knocked clean out, mate! but by the power of Jove! I believe they have been knocked in again."

For a long moment Rehoboam deeply pondered the import of this statement, but the matter baffled him.

Finally, with a smile of grim humor as accompaniment, he said with earnestness, "Well I know that in the streets of Jerusalem I was brained by a murderer, even mine own cousin, but of other violence knowledge remaineth not."

"Thou recallest absolutely naught of the eight years which have passed since thou wert smuggled aboard this vessel—thought to be a corpse?" the other marveled, to add with meanful gesture:

“Well is it for thee that such is the case; the one that broke the stave upon thy head yesterday morn hath not been an easy master for a witless Jew to serve. Howbeit thou hast brain now, and must in truth be got ashore quickly else there will be hell aboard in no time.”

After which last declaration the fisherman scratched his mat of coarse, straw-colored hair in much perplexity, for well he knew his captain would not voluntarily be deprived of an able seaman.

The revelations contained in the foregoing speech were startling indeed to the other; he was quite aware of cruelties that might be expected from an evil-hearted skipper of a fishing smack, and to have passed eight years in such loathsome slavery and have absolutely no memory of it seemed almost incredible. However, his head ached and throbbed violently, and a nauseating weakness from loss of blood was near to overcoming him again. With a great effort he stumbled to the bunk which had so recently been quitted, having just enough strength remaining to call for some nourishment.

Still digging calloused claws into his dirty shock by way of stirring up ideas, the Greek departed to obtain food; and during his somewhat

prolonged absence Rehoboam's mind very naturally dwelt with vivid detail upon the events of that last and terrible night of remembrance in Jerusalem.

"Returned unto the city of my father in season only to witness for One crucified; thence to be assaulted near unto death, and smuggled to sea as a corpse," he mused. "Surely, a son of the House of Judah hath well paid for the lack of faith in that One he should have remained always near to follow and aid. But the Nazarene is slain, and what hope is now left unto Israel? Nevertheless, my father and Rachel surely must yet live, and will receive me with great joy." Which last thought the cogitator was well content to keep for comfort till the reappearance of the seaman.

When the latter finally reentered the compartment containing his bunk, he bore a platter of brown sea bread and a small skin of wine; but the triumphant expression upon his red, wind-coarsened visage had no connection with the obtaining of the food.

"I have it, my brave son of the prophets!" he greeted, boisterously; then seeing the other's gaze resting greedily upon the refreshment, his mind was given with more clearness.

“I have found a way to get ye out of the bark and the skipper be none the wiser, thou shark?” he grinned good humoredly. “After this biscuit and wine hath been swallowed just rest back till the first watch of the night, when the captain will be ashore as drunk as a gladiator; then over-board we go, and to-morrow he will think ye were thrown to the mermaids. The old dragon hath not given me more silver than was necessary these many years, but a plenty of hard knocks—and thou didst mention twenty pieces a season back.”

“That amount shall be doubled, if thou gettest me ashore to a place of rest and safety this night,” was returned vehemently.

A surreptitious departure from the smack was successfully achieved, as had been duly planned by the Greek, the two thence going directly to a certain changer of moneys in Joppa with whom Rehoboam had transacted considerable business in former years. The usurer at first was inclined to be skeptical concerning the identity claimed by the would-be patron, even though his own vision seconded the statement being made; for knowledge of the credited death of the latter had spread widely over Judæa; but with the aid of the seaman’s testimony the matter was finally settled with satisfaction to all concerned.

After a good night of rest at a quiet inn the one so recently stricken arose as fit in body as ever he was—barring a very large and sore lump upon the crown of his head—for the wonderful recuperative powers of a strong and healthy manhood were with him. Thence the journey to Jerusalem was made by donkey without event of moment occurring, and even as the shadows of night were gathering, the Holy City was reached.

But a surprise great and sad awaited the one eagerly returning, at the old home in Jerusalem. Summons at the main portal of the mansion proved quite fruitless, and after finally gaining admittance through a rear court and side wicket, the lone servant remaining from the erstwhile days—now steward of the place—after the first amazed ecstasy of greeting was over, sorrowfully revealed to him that Rabbi Elim had survived but two years after the shock incurred by the supposed violent death of his son.

So was shown how the strongest of men may succumb quickly to affliction when also is present a burning knowledge that they themselves are in a great measure responsible for the root of the trouble.

“If such devastation hath proceeded from my father’s lack of faith in him whom I believe to have

been Messiah, what will the portion of Israel be?" Rehoboam's sleepless brain reiterated many times on that unhappy night; and at the cock's crowing in the morning he wended northward with heavy heart.

In this wise was the wanderer's return to the home once so cherished—eight years after that One for the proving of whom he had departed hence had been nailed upon the tree.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."—*2 Chronicles 12. 14.*

AS the lengthening shadow cast by the cliffs of dark basalt nearly reached the outer court of a certain house upon the suburbs of Tiberias, betokening the near approach of night, the wife of the younger son of Rabbi Mahaleel sat in the pavilion upon the roof watching her aged bondwoman Philemon prepare the evening's refreshment, at a distance seeming in outward appearance little altered from the damsel that had been thus occupied in the selfsame place at such a season more than ten years ago. But in truth the expressive features no longer showed with full curves of maidenhood, for character had been traced deeply upon them by trial. The face wore a look of much peaceful content, however, and, if possible, even a greater devotion shone from the depths of the softly luminous eyes upon the old slave than had been the latter's portion in the days long gone.

As on that past occasion the small table was

now set for two persons, but in addition a diminutive stool bearing a tiny platter was placed on a soft rug very near.

Rachel herself was reminded of the likeness of what was transpiring to that other similar occurrence, and the memories begot thereby caused her to become somewhat pensive. After a season of quiet she broke the silence by inquiring, a little sadly:

“Dost thou recall our awaiting the return of Rehoboam from Jerusalem at just such season, in this very place, at a time which seemeth many years ago, good Philemon?”

The one addressed turned a face seamed and shrunken with age toward the speaker; but the light of love which beamed thereon was never more warm and full, for it was immortal:

“The matter resteth in mine heart most surely, my mistress,” she gently crooned.

With face half averted the other continued the colloquy:

“Evil was the day that took him to counsel with my father and Saul of Tarsus on the question of Jesus of Nazareth, when he could have gone with me to Cana and seen that Great One face to face; and evil did come of it from first to last, to both son and father; howbeit the Nazarene himself hath

with infinite love and mercy opened unto them a way of hope beyond the grave."

Rarely did Rachel speak in such vein, and the faithful servant, ever anxious to divert the latter's mind from brooding retrospections, now came close with fond and soothing touch, asking the while: "What thinkest thou of that which hath so lately befallen even the same Saul which thou speakest of, O Sarai [“My lady”]?"

"That God hath designed to perform through him some great work, else he had been made to suffer also for what he hath done against the King of the Jews," was answered with earnest conviction.

"It may prove that he will yet suffer," was now spoken almost prophetically by the bondmaid; but the mistress did not hear, for sound of some one mounting to the roof had reached her.

"My husband cometh, bearing unto me my little Rehoboam!" the latter cried, happily, rising from her seat and hastening to meet the expected one.

But he whose footsteps were heard approaching was not the cherished husband; as the eager woman reached the place of ingress upon the roof she was confronted by a tall, black-bearded man whose flowing robes of linen scarce hid the powerful proportions of his frame. In that instant the

blood flaming in her cheeks surged heartward and she would have fallen if strong sustaining arms had not reached out and held her close.

“My little one! my sister! At last the Lord in mercy hath brought me unto thee again,” came murmuring in tones—ah, how familiar! And the warm embrace, and the sound of the heart throbbing with love which came unmistakably to the fainting one, called back the ebbing vitality, restored confidence to her.

“Surely this is a miracle indeed,” she whispered; tears streaming downward unrestrained. “He that was dead now liveth, even as that other One.”

“Most truly my spirit and mind were dead for a long season, O Rachel, howbeit the body hath remained quick. A blow upon the head it was that took sense from me, and a blow upon the selfsame place which gave it back. But explain thy last words more fully. Who is that other one that was dead and liveth? Meanest thou thy husband, so marvelously made whole?”

“Can it be he knoweth naught concerning the Nazarene?” marveled the one addressed. And gently drawing from the arms which held so tightly, the better to scan the bearded face, she inquired, earnestly, in response: “Dost thou know all which befell Jesus of Nazareth, my brother?”

The eyes of the other were averted as the reply was given:

"He was crucified on Calvary between two malefactors."

Eager words now trembled upon Rachel's lips, but the man thought he divined the gist of them and hastened to add to his last statement.

"The full import of that ghastly deed perpetrated by the chosen people was made clear unto me by dreadful manifestation, my sister. The conquering of a midday sun by three hours of thick darkness even at the exact time when the Nazarene was slain did surely proclaim him to be Messiah in truth. As Rehoboam the son of Solomon, I have done great evil because mine heart was not inclined to seek the Lord's face when thou wouldest have led me unto him. But punishment did come quickly upon me, as also it came upon Rabbi Elim the Strong because of his doubt of this same Jesus."

In answer to a question now plainly showing in the eyes of the one before him the speaker subjoined in explanation:

"From Joppa—where my senses were restored—I went to Jerusalem, staying a night at the old home. All concerning our father was revealed unto me by the steward there."

And now the wonderful message which burned in the woman's heart could be retained no longer: "Come to that place by the eastern parapet where knowledge of that evil journey unto Egypt was first given me, thou that wast lost but hath been found," she cried with glad accents.

And half dragging, half leading she ushered to the curtained portal of the summer house, thence to fetch the bewildered Philemon out to the surprise of her life. After this greeting was over the beaming one took a hand of each of the two, even as she had linked a twain upon a certain other occasion, speaking with voice shaking from rapture.

"Grieve thou no longer concerning Jesus of Nazareth, my brother; for *he is risen from the dead*, appearing unto many in the flesh, and hath offered pardon unto all that repent of their sins and believe on his name."

"*Risen from the dead?*" the man repeated in utter astonishment. And then came the same question which Rachel had put to Sarah of Tarsus on that other occasion when three were together thence to be joined by hand in hand.

"Didst see him face to face?"

And the gist of the answer was the same as the former one.

"That favor hath not been bestowed upon me, Rehoboam; nevertheless, there are many of the chosen people that will testify to have done so."

But the simple faith of a little child was not so strong in the son of Rabbi Elim as in the daughter and her consort; and at this point the parallel ceased; he knew that there were many in Israel whose fervor could lead to great extravagance of thought and declaration, and deemed it very possible that such had been the case in relation to the present question.

After an instant's bewildered silence he gently pushed the two women toward the curtained pavilion, saying the while: "Truly it is believed that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah, little sister; but he was done unto death, therefore what other one might there be upon the earth with power to bring him back from the realm of the departed? Howbeit let us be seated, for I am weary from much travel."

But the light of joy did not fade from Rachel's face.

"By his own power the Son of God liveth again, O brother," she said, simply, to add, with confidence: "And thou wilt believe such to be possible when thou seest my husband, even he that was thy crippled cousin."

CHAPTER XXIX ✓

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—*John 3. 3.*

GREAT was the amazement and delight of Rehoboam when Raphael, in all the glory of perfect manhood, stood strong before him. Hard it would have been to tell which of the two was the more moved by the reunion, and at sight of the pair fervently embracing Rachel smiled happily. When the little Rehoboam had been sufficiently marveled over, and admired, and tossed about by the tall, black-bearded uncle, the mother took her child quietly by the hand and confronting the one so recently restored from the lost, an expression of grave entreaty upon her face, earnestly questioned:

"Surely, brother, now thou dost believe that Messiah hath risen from the dead?"

But the man could not meet the other's searching look.

"I must speak with some one who hath in truth heard his voice since the ending of that awful day," he said, almost wearily, jaded at the lack of faith in his own heart.

It was decided that for the present the returned wanderer should make headquarters at the house in Tiberias. The place had been the home of Rachel and her consort for eight years, at the special request of the former, and her brother would not hear of change being made for any reason in connection with himself. The latter learned from Raphael that Abimelech had completely disappeared from the knowledge of his kin upon that dreadful day of darkness, and not by slightest intimation did aught of further enlightenment in the matter proceed from the son of Rabbi Elim.

"He is a murderer, but let the punishment be upon him, and not on relatives who are innocent," he told himself, sternly, once and for all time.

One midday, as the three elders and the little one were grouped in pleasant intimacy upon the finely green sod bordering a cooling fountain which played in a recess of an inner court, the sound of some one seeking admittance at the front portal came to them.

"I pray that it may be Sarah of Tarsus, that she may know the joy that hath so lately come unto us!" Rachel cried with excitement, and as she ran to greet the visitor a like sentiment showed unmistakably in the black eyes of her brother.

It proved to be the Tarsean indeed, and in an ecstasy of eagerness the hostess almost dragged her guest toward the inner court, laughing and talking incoherently the while.

And then a strange thing happened! At sight of the fine-featured, bearded fellow that awaited with smile of glad welcome upon his face the strong-nerved, calm-spirited one started as though she had been struck, for an instant clutching the arm of the more frail woman at her side; then with voice that shook in spite of her she almost whispered:

“Hath thy brother risen from the dead in truth, my sister?”

And then in deep self-reproach for her foolish lack of thought the one thus spoken to made the matter plain.

For a little while Sarah of Tarsus in turn expressed feelings of gladness and amazement at the marvelous story which was retailed to her, bravely keeping a strong hand upon herself the while; and then she made excuse to depart for a short season to confer with the bondmaid Sibmah, who still attended her mistress on all journeys, though now very old.

After a certain time had elapsed Rachel set forth to find her friend, moved by an inward feel-

ing that something was the matter—which, indeed, was true. After vainly seeking the latter in the chamber assigned to her private use, where Sibmah was busily engaged with small duties, to find the servant knew nothing of the whereabouts of her mistress, the searcher finally came upon the object of her quest in the pavilion upon the roof, half reclining upon a couch, and very white of face.

“At last I have found thee, and my spirit did not wrongly intimate of something amiss,” she spoke with deep solicitude; continuing with beseeching tones: “Wilt thou not confide unto me the trouble, O fair one?”

Raising to more upright posture with determined effort, the one addressed drew the pleader very close. “Surely a great weakness hath made me act so when only joy should be present,” she trembled, lowly, to add with voice that could just be heard by the listener so near, “But I had thought thy brother dead.”

And now a certain aspect of the matter came to Rachel and she scrutinized her friend’s face with wondering and searching look. Under this inspection blood began to return to the white cheeks in a flood tide, and in a moment Sarah of Tarsus had buried her face in the cushions of the couch in overwhelming abashment.

"I understand," Rachel whispered; and then: "Fear not, thou that hath been so strong these eight years! Thy secret shalt remain with thee and me."

After an interval of silence, when two hearts communed with a beautiful understanding, the two prepared to descend to the waiting ones left so abruptly a season past. It was then that the Tarsean was told of the other's sorrow of spirit concerning the attitude of mind which was with her brother in relation to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

When the matter was revealed the confidante remained an instant in deep thought. Then as a flash an inspiration seemed to be given her.

"Let not thy hope die, little sister!" she earnestly said; thence to lean forward and speak in the other's ear as one making known a thing of great moment.

As the message was imparted the eyes of the smaller woman lighted with expression of great expectancy. "Thou wert ever a bringer of much hope unto me, fair one," she smiled, to subjoin with firmness, "At the first hour of the morrow we will see that Rehoboam doth start for Jerusalem."

CHAPTER XXX 6

“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, . . . hath prevailed.”—*Revelation 5. 5.*

AND upon the morning following Rehoboam set forth by donkey back for the City of David, his sister and the Tarsean, with Philemon and Sibmah attendant, making the extent of the party, as Raphael was obliged to remain at home to transact certain business, retaining his little son for company.

“The object of the pilgrimage layeth upon my spirit heavy with mystery,” the man frequently exclaimed, but the intimacy with a certain one of regal proportions which the journey made possible was a very potent inducement to docility on his part.

How different to Rachel seemed the ensuing days of travel from that last time when the trip to Jerusalem had been made in the company of her brother. “So different,” she mused with constant reiteration, a smile of peaceful happiness playing upon her lips the while.

When the Tombs of the Kings had finally been

passed, the highway skirted the gaunt, somber-appearing Mount of Calvary, and at this point, to the great surprise of the one journeying at others' volition, the little cavalcade turned to follow a spiral road up the bare face of the hill.

"What meaneth this turning from the road leading to the city, Rachel?" he ejaculated, to continue with an expression of abhorrence strongly traced upon his features: "And it is unto the very place where Jesus of Nazareth was crucified that we now approach! I like it not."

At the conclusion of this outbreak the one accosted guided her steed so that a tender hand might be laid upon a shoulder of the maker of it.

"Now thou shalt learn why we have come hither, Rehoboam," she said in accents of great yearning. "The city may be entered later; but to the base of that cross which cruelly sustained the Nazarene we now go; for there thou must meet one that will do for thee great things."

Thenceforth without demur and silently the man rode forward; memory of a certain terrible season of darkness was burning within him, and recollection of a cry of sorrow incarnate vibrated in his brain.

The winding road soon brought them to the summit of the hill; a place bare and appropriately

called in Aramaic Golgotha, meaning "The Skull." Here Pontius Pilate was wont to have executed all malefactors condemned to death in his jurisdiction, and here, facing the wonderfully beautiful mountains encircling the many-pinnacled and greatly favored city of Jerusalem, the King of Glory died.

Upon the very crest of this ill-famed knoll one weather-worn beam with cross piece attached stood upright from the ground, the very embodiment of desolation; and dismounting a few paces away Rachel walked even to the shadow of it, thence to draw her veil aside and touch her lips reverently to the rough and knotted wood and return to where the others were.

"We will here await the coming of a certain one, brother," she now spoke simply; and in answer to a look of inquiry upon his face turned smilingly toward Sarah of Tarsus, saying the while: "This my sister hath made arrangement for such event to transpire by messenger sent in haste before us to the Holy City even when thou knewest not of it."

And marveling, the man glanced from the speaker to the Tarsean.

"The thing is beyond my ken, and I had best say naught until its consummation hath ap-

peared," he muttered; then he dismounted to gaze upon the city of his fathers in deep mood of retrospection.

Not many moments had passed before the figure of a woman was seen following the circling way up to Calvary, and very naturally the man supposed that she was that one he had been brought to meet.

"The wait is not long, for the certain one cometh," he proclaimed, to add in wonder: "But why broughtest thou me here to greet a damsel?"

"Fear not! Such a thing hath not been done. The one approaching is stranger to both my thought and vision," his sister quickly returned.

But suddenly eager pleasure warmed the heart of Sarah of Tarsus as her gaze followed the figure mounting the hill.

"May the God of Abraham be praised! It is my cousin Mary!" she exclaimed with joy.

"My soul singeth with thine in truth, O sister, for long hath the desire to meet that one dwelt with me," earnestly spoke Rachel.

The newcomer was now before them, a Jewess of marvelously perfect proportions, whose heavy masses of hair showed through the light meshes of her traveling veil to have the same bronze luster as was the crowning glory of her cousin.

Up to this time the man's gaze had dwelt with-

out particular interest upon the one in question; but as the meshes which concealed the latter's features were drawn aside that a proper greeting might be made, his hands involuntarily raised from astonishment.

“Dost thou know her, Rehoboam?” his sister inquired eagerly.

And now the face of the one addressed was averted in abashment. “Never have we met,” he murmured, lowly; and as something more upon the subject seemed necessary, he haltingly continued: “Many years ago, whilst in the streets of Jerusalem, I briefly glimpsed her countenance, but now—” At this point power of expression seemed to forsake him and a great confusion overwhelmed; but with great effort he finished:

“How different!”

A voice infinitely sweet and low now came even from the Magdalene herself.

“Yea, though I was the least of the Lord's handmaids, unworthy even to be called a servant, he hath done for me great things!—and holy is his name!”

But Sarah of Tarsus, now removed from her steed also, could contain herself no longer.

“Thou art altogether magnificent, my beloved one,” she cried, fondly embracing the other the

while. And then a thought suddenly came to her and she exclaimed: "Thou wast even the first to see the risen Lord face to face! Make the matter plain unto this man, I beseech thee. For this cause hath he traveled hence from Tiberias, even to be persuaded by one with authority, that Jesus of Nazareth liveth indeed."

"For this cause came I hither," echoed Rehoboam in bewilderment.

But Mary Magdalene was again speaking:

"Early on the first day of the week, the third day after that this Jesus was crucified, I stood before the tomb where they had laid him, and looking in saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, the other at the feet where his body had laid. And they said unto me, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' And I said unto them: 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' "

The revealer of the wonderful story now pushed quite back the veiling from before her beautiful face, meeting the man's gaze with steady eye.

"Whereupon I turned back and saw One standing; and after that he had called me by name I knew in truth that it was even the same Jesus which had been crucified."

As the soft voice of the speaker ceased Sarah

of Tarsus reached an arm about her, also drawing Rachel close; and so the three stood in modest purity of yearning before the son of the House of Judah, as an embodied representation of the three mighty virtues, even Faith, Hope, and Charity!

It was not enough to convince him, however.

“A woman’s heart may so burn with love that it will perceive a vision plain to no other,” he spoke, very lowly.

But up the winding way to Golgotha now strode with quick decided step a certain great and little man. And at sight of him Rachel caught her breath, thence to press even closer to her cherished friend, whispering, “See—he cometh!”

And her brother saw also!

“By the gift upon the altar I swear it is Saul of Tarsus!” the latter cried. “What call hath he in this place?”

Silent and fervent was the greeting between the two friends parted so long; and then the taller man burst forth with eager question:

“Dost *now* believe that the Nazarene was in truth the Messiah, thou scribe of the Law?”

Over the plain, sensitive, wonderfully expressive features of Paul a marvelous expression came; and a strange light played in the depth of his

eyes; raising one hand in a gesture of solemn earnestness he replied:

“I am verily a man which am a Jew, taught according to the perfect manner of the fathers; and was zealous toward God. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. And it came to pass, that as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me: ‘I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.’”

For an instant the rapt speaker paused. And now, trembling from head to foot, Rehobam reached forth with imploring gesture.

“Reveal, O thou that once so vehemently counseled me against this same Jesus. What didst thou after?”

With head inclined and whole body bent in attitude of lowly repentance the one thus adjured replied: “I said—‘Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’”

A long moment the other stood speechless, a mighty conflict of emotion surging within him. But finally a look of wonderful peace smoothed the deep tracings upon his brow and he went to the

side of Rachel, resting a hand of love upon her shoulder.

"Thou hast prevailed at last, O my sister," he said, gently. "For through the testimony of this one who hath ever spoken only by knowledge proven, I have been brought to know that my Redeemer liveth, and in spirit have seen his face!"

With tears of gladness streaming down, the woman turned to express her gratitude to the great and little man; but he had gone to the weather-beaten cross and was even now kneeling upon the ground before it, with gaze fixed heavenward and lips silently moving.

Brother and sister then went to the cross also, and kneeling beside Paul, the former breathed forth his first devotion to the risen Christ.

"O thou Nazarene!" he whispered. "Forever more *thou* art the *House of Judah!*"

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